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LINES

ADDRESSED TO CHARLES DICKENS.

It is not for thy worldly fame

That thou art dear to me ;

It is not for thy lofty name

That I so cherish thee.

Perhaps, ere all thy worth I knew,

Thy glory charm'd my sight ;

But what is glory, when the view

Beholds a spirit's light ?

Shame on the maxim—hearts unwise

Draw from themselves that lore—

“A hero seen by daily eyes

A hero is no more !”

Thou art but held at higher rate
When nearer understood ;
The gaze that sinks the merely great
Exalts the truly good.

I saw thee from afar compel
The crowd with magic art ;
Beneath the power that wove the spell
I found the genial heart.

And, when thy inner spirit gave
Its treasures unto me,
Thy proudest act seemed but a wave
Of that rich boundless sea.

Oh, 'tis a sacred thing to gaze
On springs great minds that feed ;
E'en as the sun excels its rays
The thought outshines the deed.

Yet, when thy hand in friendship's link
I grasp, how warmly run
The currents of my soul—to think
On all that hand has done !


It is no hand of warrior, stain'd
By conquest's crimson touch ;
Yet hand of warrior never gain'd
From victory so much.

Down hath it struck from places high
Of Wrongs a giant horde,
And slain old Errors flashingly
As any beaming sword.

'Tis standard to the gallant host
That forward strive : where'er
Men battle most, and struggle most,
That dauntless hand is there.

Fresh banners, with a force unspent,
Of thought it has unfurl'd :
Wielding the pen — God's instrument —
It hath waved on the World !

Then, when that hand to mine its free
Warm welcome doth extend,
I thank kind Heaven who granted me
To grasp it as a friend.



PREFACE
TO
THE SECOND EDITION.

A POET without a specialty is nothing. A specialty is the centre, round which and from which all his productions of a miscellaneous kind group themselves, and assume a value. This is a truth which has been long felt, but is only now beginning to be shaped palpably out of the poetical accumulations of the past: for critical judgment is a growth of time, and the world has only of late attained its critical majority—its era of reviewal and definition. Nor is it only the world's judgment which is dim till made clear by time; the object also on which it has to exercise itself is obscure when it lies too near the current period. As a general rule, the niche that a poet is permanently to fill is not clearly seen till some years after his death. A popular writer will mostly live: but his popularity has to be eliminated from the elements of his fame. The local and accidental have to be subtracted, and every mist of passion must pass away, before he can be truly judged. Often, too,

those productions of his, which during his life-time were most celebrated, are not the materials of which his lasting fame is built. Neither are his longest, nor those which would seem his most important poems the inevitable key-stone of the arch whereon rests his enduring reputation. The "Cotter's Saturday Night," "The Vision," and even the "Tam o' Shanter" of Burns, which, while Burns lived, were considered his best things, do not at the present time constitute the specialty of Burns. As a writer of songs he is most identified with the popular heart; and his "Scots wha hae wi' Wallace bled" was the diamond of the crown, which, wrought from gems of his own mine, was immortally set upon his head in the Burns festival of 1858.

In the same way, Wordsworth is only beginning to be removed to a visible distance by death. The "Lyrical ballads," and the boldness of the theory on which he constructed them, first attracted towards him the public attention. The "Idiot Boy" and "Peter Bell" were conceived to be the great strongholds, from which the admirers might carry on the siege against the non-admirers of the bard. Then, Wordsworth's fame was a party-question. Now, we dismiss the party-question. We sweep away the affected and often wrong self-classification of Wordsworth's poems, which once, on the *omne ignotum* principle, seemed so sublimely philosophic, and we perceive that parts of "the Excursion," the lines composed near Tintern Abbey, "the Leech-gatherer," the "Laodumia," and the "Ode on the Intimations of Immor-

talities from the Recollections of early Childhood" constitute Wordsworth's claim to the philosophical supremacy, of which—and how slowly here has the popular judgment been matured!—he is beginning to dispossess Milton.

Nor in this is Wordsworth doing Milton a wrong. Milton has other claims on immortality. Led astray by the individual glories of Milton's language, by the splendour of Milton's scenic conception, Wordsworth himself—much more than the multitude—crowned Milton king of imaginative thought. So "awestruck" does Wordsworth say he is, by "the divine mind of Milton," that he is manifestly unconscious of his own superior divinity—superior, in as far as the metaphysical transcends the physical imagination. Confining ourselves, for the present, wholly to a consideration of *Paradise Lost*—the special domain of Milton—we perceive that Milton is rather lord of a creative phantasy than of the pure philosophy of imagination: that he is strictly an Epic Poet, who tells a story, supremely interesting to the human race, in a glorious manner, for which we have expressly coined from himself the epithet—Miltonic: and that in the course of this grand poem, he frequently displays a beauty more than epic. But *Paradise Lost*—great as it is—is not unamenable to criticism. It consists too exclusively of one magnificent burst of poetry sweeping through the first four books, and then subsiding into learned languors, which, though interspersed with incomparable things, are still languors. Yet, with all deductions, if we pass from

Milton's doubtful philosophy and still more doubtful theology, to the firmer ground of his epic power, we must allow that Milton has produced an unrivalled narrative poem, whose mightiest praise is to remain human in the midst of the supernatural elements with which he has invested his sublime creation.

Again, as regards Gray, his odes are not far from justifying in modern opinion Johnson's famous Shakspearian motto for them—

“Bubble, bubble,
Toil and trouble!”

We now can afford to acknowledge that Johnson was not envious of Gray, but zealous for truth, when he fell foul of the poet's splendid mosaic of common-places, and when he asserted that a few stanzas in the “Elegy in a Country Churchyard” were the enduring stuff, whereof was woven Gray's robe of immortality. The truth is, Gray's specialty was elegy. Even the famous Ode on a distant prospect of Eton College is, in fact, an elegy—a lament—the most beautiful ever penned—over past youth, whose remembrance is a sigh, over present revellers in youth, who from their joyous banquet are beckoned away—on—on—to pain and sorrow.

Cowper has a specialty; but it is far beyond the narrow one at first assigned him by a sect. He is beloved not for his creed, but in spite of it. We can now afford to smile in tender pity at his bigoted de-

nunciations of the world. We love him as the domestic poet of England. His pictures, throughout the Task, of home-pleasure, and country peace—the tender mournfulness of the lines to Mary and to his Mother's miniature picture, float in mild light round the figure of the sensitive bard; and, as they recur to memory, we crown him, as he himself crowned the Winter's eve,

“ King of intimate delights,
“ Fire-side enjoyments, home-born happiness.”

Later down, we see Anacreon Moore, as he was called, somewhat fading from the problematical notoriety of “Lalla Rookh,” and the “Loves of the Angels,” to shine out as the Lyrist of his native land, as the Prometheus of his country's melodies, which he has kindled into life by verse that lies deeper than music.

Then rises on our view the galaxy of Byron, Shelley, and Keats—poets whom we are only just beginning, through the wondrous perspective-glass of Time, to see as they are. Who dares to say that Time is not a mighty avenger? Years have almost reversed the judgment of their own period upon these three poets. The much that was adventitious in the fame of Byron; the attack upon his early Muse by the “Edinburgh Review;” his cutting revenge; his angry voyage to lands then all but unvisited; his singing that voyage in noble verse; his return home to make himself a reputation of half-corsair, half-oriental voluptuary; his domestic broils and foreign exile—

the whole mysterious aggregate of romantic interest, which cast haloes round the thin pamphlets of verse in dark grey covers (Ah! blessed days when poems *did* come out in thin pamphlets!) which the poet poured fast upon the eager world—all in fact that was local in Byron's fame is gathered to the grave. What remains? A conviction that Byron was a remarkable man of his time, a poet gifted with choice gifts, but not a man who moulded his time, not a poet who had a great specific power, not a poet who was deeply acquainted with the central facts of life. Why he was formerly called the "Searcher of dark bosoms" we fail to perceive; indeed, we almost suspect that he was an indifferent exponent of his own.

On the other hand, Keats and Shelley, who in their day were deemed hardly worthy to tie Byron's shoe-string, stand out to the present generation as two mighty forms, embodying each a principle of poetry—the first, the sensuous, the second, the spiritual. They are seen to have left their finger-marks far more distinctly on their time, than Byron did. Byron is remembered, and probably ever will be, as the Author of Childe Harold's Pilgrimage; felt to be a poet as the writer of Cain, the Deluge, Manfred, and Don Juan; but Byron has no imitators, no followers now.

On the other hand Keats and Shelley are daily, and even too much resuscitated and represented in the Keatsian and Shelleyan strains of the fervid youth of our era.

Nor must I omit to notice that there are poets, who have taken their niche rather it might seem through the union of various specialties, than by the possession of one. Lord Byron himself, with *Werner* in one hand, and *Don Juan* in the other, may be cited as an example of the mixed order of poet. Campbell's fame is a kind of Trinity, whereof the *Pleasures of Hope*, *Gertrude of Wyoming*, and the *Battle-songs*, are the individual rays. Hood comes before us, first as a writer of the quaint and comical, then of the touching and almost the profound. Coleridge is difficult to specify, on account of the multifariousness of his poetic writings—"Ode, and Elegy, and Sonnet"—Drama original and translated—and Lyrical story of the highest quality. But, on analyzing the component parts, which constitute the fame of these poets, we shall find that, in the midst of apparent versatility, each was only feeling his way through the untrue vocation to the true. As every mixed substance in physics, when resolved into its elements, may be ranged under the banner of one in particular, so the poets of a mixed order, when submitted to the test of public opinion, (which is always true in the main) will come forth, each, with some peculiar stamp upon him. Byron, great in satire, capital at description, good at dramatic passion, is still most admirable in mingled wit, and pathos; and his *Don Juan*, that unites the qualities of his first and latest years, is confessedly his master-piece, which even learned Bishops have condescended—in spite of its

alleged wickedness—to annotate. Hood's specialty is scarcely of a mixed kind. He mistook his calling, which was not humour so much as a singular pathos, whose power is increased by a leaven of bitter scorn. Some expression too good, or too loathly for the occasion, is always marring his pleasantries.

“In such a dark conspiracy between the sea and sky”

is not a joke but a very fine line. The wave's

“Crest of awful white
Like Neptune with a leprosy,”

raises an image not calculated to excite mirth. “The Last Man” is only connected with wit and humour by a sorry joke at the end, without which it would be a fine sarcastic poem. Colman and Peter Pindar (Dr. Walcot) are as much before Hood in frolic fun, as he is before them in poetic inspiration. Witness Lord Hoppergollop's cook of the one, and the Apple-dumpling of the other. A laughing soul sets others laughing: but behind the mirth of Hood lay the shadow of his own heart. The “Song of the Shirt,” which, since it has a nation's eulogy needs not mine; the “Dream of Eugene Aram,” and above all the “Bridge of Sighs,” prove wherein lay the peculiar power of Hood.

Coleridge, a man of various faculty, who has variously advanced the progress of thought, is especially great as the poet of Wonder that has its roots in Truth.

The "Ancient Mariner," and the "Christabel," remind me of Turner's picture of Polyphemus, who lies—not seen at first—stretched like a giant-shadow on the Sicilian mountains. Is it a cloud, or a human form that we behold? We know not; but the uncertainty speaks to us of mighty things. So, in the two great works of Coleridge, the union of the wild and weird with the common appearances of nature lays on the reader a peculiar spell of which both the Essential and the Vague are component parts; a spell, be it observed, of which, in poetry, Coleridge was alone the master.

As regards Campbell, the clever boyish poem of "the Pleasures of Hope," and the sweet maturer strain of "Gertrude of Wyoming" are merged in the stirring music of the Battle of the Baltic, and Hohenlinden. Thus, the apparent exceptions to our rule of specialty, confirm the thesis which we are considering.

But the plan, which I have proposed to myself in this Preface, beckons me on farther still. I have to bring my history of poetic specialties to a less clear and more dangerous ground than any that I have yet trod—to the ground occupied by the actual living generation of poets; I have to point out the niches in the Temple of Fame which I consider either as already, and worthily, filled at this day, or as giving indications that a bright shadow is stealing into them from certain Presences of Poetry that are climbing thitherward.

That the Author of "In Memoriam," and "The

two Voices," possesses a metaphysical power, which pierces to the depth of human things, no one will be rash enough to dispute. The Metaphysics of life are his specialty, just as the abstract Philosophy of Man was the specialty of Wordsworth. Even his descriptions of external objects are metaphysical. Such expressions as the "Layers of deep shade" of the yew, the fountain that leaps "like sheet-lightning," "the brain of the purple mountain," seize the inner essence of nature, and are not mere descriptions, but rather reflections of Plato's primitive images, and absolute pre-existences, of things which have been only modelled after those immortal types and moulds of all visible creation. The death of a friend is not to him a mere human grief. It is a shadow, large as the universe, climbing hills as the sun descends, pervading the great ocean with larger sound, entering the realm of death with Lazarus, and, like Lazarus, returning to life at the voice of Life itself. Tennyson has found his niche.

Robert Browning is a psychological poet, full of curious and most interesting subtleties that concern man's mixed nature. Now he is wildly wrestling with Death amongst the tomb-stones, now questioning life amongst real "Men and Women," anon probing the heart of human creeds, and setting forth his own perplexities of belief under the guise of the religious doubts of German sceptics.

A young poet, who may be hailed as the "coming

man" amongst poets; who, under the pseudonym of Owen Meredith, conceals a name, illustrious and by him to be still more illustrated, has already achieved a conspicuous specialty. He follows warmly on the track of the forward time, and presents the world with conscientious studies of itself embodied in the frame of an imaginative mind. In the "Wanderer" and "Lucile," he throws aside conventional forms of thought, often of rhythm, and, with a large power of pictorial language, sets before us certain phases of life—that, in fact, which he knows and feels—(would that every poet did the same!) piercing to the hidden realm of passion through the external folds of custom.

There are other poets of the time, whom I cannot pause to specify, while I deprecate all notion that I treat them with designed neglect. Be they assured, I delight in the fresh spirit of the age, to which they adapt themselves. So far from being a "laudator temporis acti," I hold, not from uneasy craving after novelty, but from the maintenance of a sacred principle, that the Present excels the Past, because it is the last thought of God. I do not say that, as regards individual growths, the same colossal statures will shoot up as in a former generation. We have Horses now, but no Megatheria: we have now a hundred good painters, a hundred good poets, for one that wrote in Elizabeth's days;—but we have no Corregio—no Shakspeare. And why should we? What should we do with them? Nature does not tolerate such super-

fluity. There are not such poets now as there were of yore. Thank God for it! We have poets that befit this age—this wondrous age—of depth, and passion, and central humanity, which, like Shelley's rose in the garden of "the Sensitive Plant," opens itself, till

"Fold by fold to the panting air
The soul of its beauty and love lies bare."

In all things we have passed the pig-tailed age—the German Zopf-Zeit—and, whether in Painting, Music, or Poetry, we now must have earnestness, or we neither listen nor look. Does it not seem as if our ancestors had been afraid of emotion, lest it should displace the patch, send the powder flying, and jog the pig-tail out of its proper angle? Pretty pretences at passion, little Corydon anguishes, were the keenest luxuries of feeling allowed before the French Revolution. In those days there was nothing like O'Neil's "Eastward Ho!" nor Millais' "Black Brunswicker." But Boucher and Watteau painted Court ladies in gallant deshabbles, pretending to be milkmaids, and (God wot!) Dianas. Mighty chapel-masters then adapted strains not too agonizing to librettos not too productive of tears. Is not the music of the eighteenth century suggestive of men with swords and ruffles dancing eternal minuets with ladies in hoops and lappets? Compare Mozart's Giovanni, whose utmost horrors and most terrible distresses only nurse you in a sense of delicate amusement,

with that dawn of modern opera—Norma; or (still greater contrast!) with that newest new of passionate agony, the *Trovatore*.

Then, Reader, that you may know your century, read a volume of Richardson's *Grandison* (to Richardson nevertheless be all honour in his time), and afterwards take up what you will not lay down till you have finished it—Dickens's "*Two Cities*." Do we not show more natural face, now, than in the time of rouge and patches, and wax masks to keep off the sun?

But it is in poetry most that the world has ceased to trivialize. In France, the sentimental strains of Lamartine are replaced by the stern and vigorous poetry of Victor Hugo—the Balzac of rhyme. In England, where, not long ago, when some favourite bard sang—

"The bar-maids crowded to know him

"And lisp out their thanks for that pretty new poem,"

we have now an audience of fine-browed intelligent women, listening to a deep philosophy which would have scarcely found a hearer even amongst the men of the past generation. The world endures no longer the careless handling of the past; neither the soft fuzzy touch of the exploded academician, nor the surface-poetry of Laureates whose schoolmaster was Pye. It requires studies from nature, and from the very soul of nature. Seeking of our time the characteristic

tendency, I perceive a strong bias towards a syncretism of the sensuous and the spiritual—a leaning towards inner truth, not devoid of form. In its struggle after the Ideal, the age has become realistic. For this very reason, a poet of our day without a specialty is more than ever nothing.

Considerations like to these have not been without impulse in prompting me to consider my own powers, and in determining how I might best employ them.

The plan of the moral universe, the upward tendency of men's affections, those objects in fine for which the epithet *religious-philosophical* might be coined, have long occupied my mind. Even in that early period of life, when the first notes of the young aspirant are like the indefinite song of the just-fledged birds in spring, that warble for the mere pleasure of warbling; even in that unconscious time I felt drawn towards the analysis of the religious Reason as allied to the emotive principle in man. In "Sermons in Sonnets" that analysis first took a definite shape, at least in verse. For, long before the publication of "Sermons in Sonnets," my prose-work of "Facts in Mesmerism" had demonstrated the direction taken by my thoughts. That work, though it may not on the surface appear to be so, was the peristyle of the temple which, with honest labour, I desire to rear. In fact, whatever I have written, whether in prose or verse, whether gathered in volumes, or scattered in periodicals, possesses its unity, and has emanated from one master-purpose.

My various efforts in one direction remind me of a bee which I once saw hovering about an old wall. Hither and thither it flew with apparently objectless flight; and it was only by long observation I discovered that the creature—a mason bee—was seeking where to build its nest, to discover a spot neither too low, nor too high, nor too shady, nor too exposed, whereon to unload its little hod of mortar, and commence for the great aim of its existence a dwelling at once safe and permanent.

That I should finally have chosen verse rather than prose as the vehicle of my attempts to meet the requirements of modern spirituality, has, of course, not been a coldly-calculated matter of volition.

The prose of a poet, and the poetry of a prose-writer are two very different things: and, if I know anything of my own consciousnesses, prose has been with me an accident,—poetry, a necessity. But, having no right to force upon the world my own inner convictions, I may answer by various external reasons the question, “Why choose verse to embody a system of religious philosophy?”

Because verse is the grappling-hook of memory. Verse takes hold. Some little line of poetry floats over the ocean that engulfs earth’s buried wrecks. If aught survive decay, it is a happy verse. A couplet—ay, a single line, if pertinent to humanity—may confer on its writer that immortality of beneficial remembrance which poets seek.

Poor Keats, "the wondrous boy who perished"—not in his pride but—in his despair—would have died happy—nay, would he have died then and there?—could he have foreseen the apotheosis of that one line of his—"A thing of beauty is a joy for ever?" Poor—nay rich—Keats, thus much of thee, at least, survives! The Managers of the Manchester Exhibition in 1857 could find nothing worthier for the motto of their enterprise than this golden grain from the treasury of him, who thought his name was writ on water.

Again. Religious philosophy is best conveyed in verse, because by verse a poet places himself more vividly in communication with the faculties he addresses, with the imaginative consciousness of man, with the higher emotive feelings of the human bosom, with the best and purest part of humanity.

Yet again. Because poetry is more instinctive than prose; and whatever reply comes from the void, as to the meaning of this mysterious life, and its dark sufferings, is little more than an instinct. How, except in verse, seize and embody those intimations of eternal beauty which Wordsworth himself—the prophet, and the priest of poetry—only ventured to hint at, as

"Fallings from us—vanishings—
Blank misgivings of a creature
Moving about in worlds not realized;
High instincts before which our mortal nature
Did tremble like a guilty thing surprised."

Again. Man shrinks from direct instruction: and poetry in conveying instruction is less direct than prose. Discourses from the pulpit sometimes sermonize whole congregations into nothing better than a pious hardness: folios of argumentative Divinity, even if read, may fail to work into the mind one definite idea of God, of man, or of creation. But the electric light of poetry, when flashed upon life's tangled landscape, has power suddenly to single out for the delighted gaze some spot of beauty, some form of brightness, which for one inestimable moment solves the universe for the doubting heart.


The glimpse-like and fragmentary nature of such oracles as have had any effect in soothing the souls of men may serve for reply to those critics—kind critics though they were—who wished to find in the “Three Gates” a more clear and definite solution of Earth's agonies than is given there at any length. My own feeling is, that such answers as are possible to the painful riddle of existence may be found, by one who seeks them, scattered up and down throughout the volume. My intention, indeed, has been to leave to my readers the pleasure of discovering for themselves the little flowers that cheer the dark places of the book before them. Above all, I desired that they should not affix to my poems the arid title—didactic.

My idea of a didactic poet is painfully allied to a picture of Dr. Watts in a Dr. Busby-wig, which was the frontispiece to a spelling-book, wherefrom, with much

hate in my heart, I had to learn—"Birds in their little nests agree," an assertion which, to my great relief, I soon discovered, by ocular evidence of a brood of black-birds fighting for a bit of worm, to be an unmitigated fiction.

Precisely in order to avoid being didactic, I have broken up this book into portions—often into small lyrical fragments—and have tried to vary my manner of address in order to address as many classes of readers as possible.

With the same object, I have admitted within the last of the "Three Gates" some poems which are manifestly of a different tone to that taken by the others. Defining Religion as the free, and Piety as the submissive, view of God—the first chosen by Reason, the second induced upon the mind by a child's education and a country's creed—I may class these exceptive pieces under the head of poems of pious sentiment. Such, I felt, were not unneeded. A religion entirely rational would never take hold of the affections of men; and the purest belief, if not individualized, might evaporate. Necessarily, the pieces alluded to are more idiosyncratic than the rest; but I would not exclude them on that account. Too much, I think, has been said of late in disfavour of sentimental and subjective poetry. Life itself is a sentiment, variously subjective to each particular human being; and, if each poet expresses it as he feels it, he adds something to humanity's experience of humanity. Moreover, the pro-



scription of subjective poetry, which took its rise from Göthe, is point-blank contrary to mankind's ready acceptance of the same. The dogmatic here, as elsewhere, reverses the practical. Shakspeare's sonnets are held precious because of the light they throw upon Shakspeare's inner heart. No part of *Paradise Lost* is more loved than Milton's lament over his own blindness. Who would banish from the Task Cowper's pathetic mention of himself in the passage beginning

" I was a stricken deer that left the herd
Long since :"

or from Shelley's works the " Stanzas, written in dejection near Naples?"

So much in explanation of the particular department of poetry, on which, in the " Sermons in Sonnets " and in the present volume, I have endeavoured to plant the flag of discovery, and of rightful possession. The ecclesiastical and dogmatic parts of religion have had their priesthood, and their poetic illustrators ; but it seemed to me that metaphysical religion still wanted an exponent.

As to the diction of the following poems, I feel that the subject involves a question almost as generally important to my readers as the question of the specialty of thought embodied in that diction is important to myself.

Now, at a time when the world shews interest in considering the power of language and its aptness to its

end: Now, when "Samples of fine English"* are given to warn English authors from committing shipwreck of modest speech on the rocks of ambitious pretention: Now, when "Poets"—great established poets—are "found at fault,"† because of untruthful metaphor, and old well-worn classical allusion: Now, in this age of analysis, when, taking note of everything, we are also taking note of our style of writing: it is well to aid an impulse so excellent by endeavouring to ascertain what fixed laws the language of poetry may obey, or ought to obey.

I shall therefore, previously to explaining why I chose for myself a certain poetic diction, give a slight sketch of poetic diction as it was and is.

The commonest reader of prose and poetry knows that the best prose is not poetry—knows that poetic prose is not a good thing;—recognises a prosaic expression when he meets with it in poetry, and knows that a prosaic expression met with in poetry is a bad thing. From this general consent of men, I infer that poetic diction and prose diction are different things; and, as the perception of difference between two things is always a source of pleasure to men, I also infer that poets, both to please themselves and others, have always endeavoured to make their diction essentially different from prose-diction. Not that a set of faculties is addressed in poetry wholly unlike those which are addressed in

* Cornhill Magazine, February 1861, page 205.

† All the Year Round, March 16, 1861, page 534.

prose. Novel-writers address the affections, the fancy, the imagination, and even, as regards the construction of their sentences, the sense of melody, in their readers. That historians, theologians, metaphysicians, and critics do the same, from Herodotus to Macaulay, and from Plato and Aristotle to Jeremy Taylor and Dr. Johnson, will hardly be disputed. This similitude in the faculties addressed by prose and poetry, renders the manner of addressing them more needful to be varied. The object of poets, then, has been to create a specific difference between their diction and that of prose-writers—a specific difference, that should be felt all along by their readers, and be ever present to them. This specific difference has been sought for differently at different times. In the early ages of a nation, when narrative pleased most—and, be it parenthetically remarked, there is an ever-recurring tendency in man, from infancy to age, to be pleased with a story—the poet-narrator distinguished himself from the prose-narrator by throwing his story into measure, as well as by heightening the imaginative and pictorial effects of his narrative. The measure and the rhythm was to be such as could be sung, or chanted; and the language was to be as a picture—“*Ut pictura poesis.*”

Something of this idea of the combination of the two other great arts with poetry has always remained to mankind;—though Virgil is not painted with a harp in his hand, as Homer was.

Omitting, what I neither love to read nor to write,

a learned disquisition on the ancients, I come at once to consider how the best poets of our own land have set their diction apart from the diction of the prose-writers. Certainly not by violent and forced means, by unnatural straining or distortion, by startling terms, by affectation, or by far-fetched conceits. The farther we remount the stream of song, the simpler we shall find the means of difference. Chaucer—the Homer of daily life—a writer of short domestic Epics—chiefly dissevers his style from that of prose by rhyme and measure of a most artful kind, whose precious melody is only hidden from us by our now different methods of accentuation. Here is a specimen of his verse, embodying a charming idea of true gentleness, from the Wife of Bath's tale:

“Loke, who that is most vertuous alway,
Prive and apert,* and most entendeth ay
To do the gentil dedes that he can,
And take him for the gretest gentilman.
Crist wol we claime of him our gentillesse,
Not of our elders for hir old richesse.”

Such a pure perspicuous medium as the above, the language of Chaucer is throughout his works. But society progresses: Life becomes more complex, Poetry therefore more of an art; and we find Spenser elevating poetic forms of speech by means of a more cunning harmony, and by a diction more ornate, and figurative. Take this example, which is wondrous music.

* In private and in public.

“And, fast beside these, trickled softly downe
 A gentle streame, whose murmuring wave did play
 Eamongst the puny stones, and made a sowne
 To lull him soft asleepe that by it lay:
 The wearie traveller, wandering that way,
 Therein did often quench his thirsty heat,
 And then by it his wearie limbes display,
 While creeping slomber made him to forget
 His former payne, and wypt away his toilsome sweat.”

The Faery Queene, Book ii. Canto v. Stanza 30.

Here we perceive that the Van Eycks had melted on to the Peruginos of poetry. A Raphael was yet to come. Do not let us mistake the earliest good for the matured best. Old Chaucer was likened by Denham to the morning-star — not to the sunrise, or mid-day, and was by Spenser called

“Dan Chaucer, *well* of English undefiled” —

not a river, remark: We shall now perceive the progress of art taking its natural course, from dawn and well-head to noon-day, and river. First a certain hardness and baldness, and dryness of execution — outline in fact — then the juiciness stealing in by degrees, till the round fulness appears; and art is really the reflex of nature. Then — I complete the history by anticipation — an unnatural puffiness, an unhealthiness, and degradation: then, by nature’s bounty, restoration, and something of a recurrence of the old cycle.

But, for the present, we pause upon the period when

Spenser was just dying, and Shakspeare starting into his first dramatic fame—the golden Elizabethan age as it is called—the “golden age of poetry” as I believe.

Here we find that the problem how to elevate the language of poetry above that of prose has suddenly found a new solution. That solution is—no longer rhyme, no longer wholly measure, no longer mere imagery and metaphor, but simply—the imaginative use of common words. Difference with similitude—there lies the secret: for, if we love to perceive difference, we also love to perceive similitude. Observe how this draws into an orb the manifold requisitions which Poetry has to fulfil and reconcile.

In addition to the constant hidden pleasure, which she ought to produce in man from the mere manner in which words are employed, she has both to raise us above our daily life, and to keep us constantly conversant with it; to address herself to man's loftiest faculty, the imaginative consciousness, yet retain her hold for ever on the lowliest human heart: to resemble, in fine, the water-lily which, though anchoring in mother-earth, lays her head upon the heaving wave, sports with the breeze, looks up to the sun's mid-day eye, and holds communion at once with the lowest and the highest of God's universe.

Here then we arrive at the difference between poetry, and poetic thought—between

“The vision and the faculty divine
Yet wanting the accomplishment of verse,”

and the two in combination. We conceive how a thought may be poetic, yet, not being poetically clothed, may not be poetry.

I open my one-volumed Shakspeare, and, trying the Sortes Shakspearianæ, lay my finger at random on a passage, which, though not exactly a passage that I should have chosen, is more than sufficient to prove my point—just because it is taken at random.

KING HENRY IV. Act iv. Scene 4.

P. Henry. "I never thought to hear you speak again."

K. Henry. "Thy wish was father, Harry, to that thought :

I stay too long by thee ; I weary thee.

Dost thou so hunger for my empty chair,

That thou wilt needs invest thee with my honours

Before thy hour be ripe ? O foolish youth !

Thou seek'st the greatness that will overwhelm thee.

Stay but a little ; for my cloud of dignity

Is held from falling with so weak a wind,

That it will quickly drop."

Observe, that, wherever a transpicuous simplicity does not occur as a relief to the intense imagery that pervades the general tone of the above passage, the force of the effect resides in the imaginative employment of common words—words, which, though common, are part and parcel of our natural instincts and sympathies. The wish is *father* to the thought. The Prince *hungers* for the monarch's empty chair. The hour is not *ripe*. The King's *cloud* of dignity is only held from falling by so weak a *wind*, &c. Observe also the picturesque use of the word *drop*, which fore-runs the actual, and paints

the shower into which the cloud will be resolved. Take a more condensed example from another Play—the Merchant of Venice—

“ So far this shadow
Doth *limp* behind the substance.”

Here, by the employment of a single homely word, the poet vividly paints to the mind of his reader an attempt to reach a point which will never be attained.

Sometimes it may be that the effect of Shakspeare's vigorous diction is heightened by the mere fact that many of his forcible words, which have for us a figurative charm because of their being used in a sense to us unusual, were, in the poet's time, generally employed in the sense in which he employs them.

“ There's the scroll,
The *continent*, and summary of my fortune.”
Merchant of Venice, Act iii. Scene 3.

“ The Duke cannot deny the course of law;
For the *commodity* that strangers have
With us in Venice, if it be denied,
Will much impeach the justice of the state.”
Same Play.

Continent meaning that which contains, and *commodity*, convenience or privilege. The more words remount to their primitive signification the more effective and poetical they are. Naturally so. Language itself was the first poetry of man. Words, before they were twisted by the polite distortions of society, were meta-

phors of nature full of the divine essence of the universe. They were all, more or less, phonetic, and consisted of the freshest signs of things. They were God's translations of His works to the eye and ear of man. Consequently, the poet, whose verse is full of Saxon vigour, writes a better diction than the latinized scholar, who takes his language at second hand.*

Of the true English poets there was a multitude in Shakspeare's time, or a little after Shakspeare's time. During a glorious era Ben Jonson, Marston, Marlowe, Massinger, Fletcher, Rowley, Ford, and others wrote golden language.

But the best poetic diction, like Christianity, began to be corrupted almost as soon as it was promulgated: and, like Christianity, it was first turned from its primitive simplicity by the friends in the camp. Milton's earlier poems—the youthful sonnets—the “Allegro,” and “Penseroso”—the “Lycidas” and the “Comus”—are for the student models of pure poetic writing. Milton was at first content to be himself a student of the poets of the Elizabethan time. He then was content to hear

“Sweetest Shakspeare, fancy's child,
Warble his native wood-notes wild.”

But the very expression—so like a damning with faint praise!—“Native wood-notes wild”—shewed that Milton, even in his youth, had a drawing towards the

* See an Article in All the Year Round on “Twisted Words.”

artificial and the stately. And, when the great blind bard was elaborating the *Paradise Lost*, he put on the "learnèd sock" at which he had before glanced with satisfaction. I blame him not. The necessity of every great mind to create a language for itself was upon him. Milton could no longer be a copyist, or a student. He became author of a language richer, but less pure than poetic language was of yore. Where once the sweet Saxon floated easily from its native source, the turgid, because derivative, Latin swelled pompously through a region not its own. Instead of such lines as

" Yet once more, O ye laurels, and once more
Ye myrtles brown, with ivy never sere,
I come to pluck your berries harsh and crude,
And with forced fingers rude
Shatter your leaves before the mellowing year,"

we have


" Thrones, Dominations, Princedoms, Virtues, Powers,"

and Adam thus addressing Eve—

" Eve, now I see thou art exact of taste,
And elegant, of sapience no small part."

Milton had become a mighty poet, but not a safe model for a poet. He is himself alone—he is a nation's highest pride—but, student, do not imitate him! Nay, you will not—for the Miltonic style is a dream of other days. But I must go further than this. I am compelled to record my conviction that the latinized style of Para-

dise Lost broke down the mighty barriers which the works of the Elizabethan writers had raised against the tide of encroaching change. Thenceforward each poet strove to make himself special, not so much by taking a particular province of poetry, as by writing poetry in a style far gone from the original righteousness of style. Euphuism was in the ascendant. Cowley wandered into the region of small conceits: Dryden—a great man—invented the first swing of that “clock-work tintinnabulum of rhyme” which Pope—a greater man—made more monotonous. We have heard of the fatal facility of the octosyllabic verse; but heaven shield us from the fatal facility of the Hexameter-couplet; when mortals, using or abusing it, do not, as Chaucer did and as Pope did not, overflow the second line at proper intervals into the cadences of another couplet. Pope has the bad eminence of being the first to tunnel Parnassus, and drive railways through the country of the Muses. More than any man, he frenchified and adulterated England’s honest poetic diction. To him is due the poetry made easy to the multitude, the slipshod ungrammatical construction, the trivial mannerism, the wretched stilted common-place, which for more than a century deluged England, and spawned forth the hobbling Hayleys, the pompous Darwins, et hoc genus omne, who flourished at the close of the luckless year seventeen hundred, when all revolutions were rife—except revolutions in the realm of rhyme. Nevertheless, Pope was a great poet. Indeed, had he



not been so, would he have been dangerous and influential? He was a creator, a moulder of his time, who stamped a form, though a bad one, on the poetry of his era. But he was more than this. He was perhaps the greatest Satirist (not even excepting Juvenal) whom the world ever was enriched with. He was the writer of a charming mock Epic—and, above all, author of the “Essay on man,” which is a very great philosophical poem, and, if the style were equal to the thought, would be one of the greatest philosophical poems extant. No matter that the philosophy is said to be Bolingbroke’s. What a poet makes his own is his own.

Cowper was to the present generation of poets what the period called Eocene—i. e.: dawn of the new—is to our geologists. The style of his Task, though far from perfect, is immeasurably above that of the Popèan era.


Byron did not elevate our poetic diction. He is flowing, but not profound. He is not too ornate, but he is not logical. Now the writers of the Elizabethan age were largely logical. They had no parliamentary oratory which could hide a false thought. And herein Byron differs from them. The charm of his easy style, not unfrequently, does hide a false thought. If I may characterise Byron’s manner in one word, that word shall be—*eloquent*.

But a greater than Byron, though as yet only recognised by a few, was already before the public. In seventeen hundred and ninety-eight, nine years before

Byron published his first youthful poems, Wordsworth had given to the world the "Lyrical ballads," and a new period for poetry was virtually begun. In a preface to "Lyrical ballads" Wordsworth had laid his finger on the sore that had been festering at the heart of poetry; and, like every genius, outstripping his time, had proclaimed to the public how false was the style in a blind admiration of which men had been doting and drivelling for years and years.

But Wordsworth, in his poetry, was not always true to his own theory. The workmanship of his verse betrays too often that want of ease, and that eccentricity, into which restoration of any kind invariably betrays the restorer. In the beginning, poets, painters, sculptors—be it never forgotten—studied directly from nature. In a revival, artists study from the first poets, painters, sculptors. So Art has lost a step. To reproduce Chaucer, Perugino, Phidias, is not to reproduce nature.

Passing over intermediate steps of beneficial change—all, in fact, which is not era—I proceed at once to Tennyson, who, in my judgment, has done more for poetic style than Wordsworth. Tennyson's aim seems to me more definite than Wordsworth's—more drawing towards the sources of nature—less open to the charge of conscious imitation, and purposely drawing outlines of pre-Miltonic dryness. Even in Tennyson's earlier volumes, "A Dream of fair women"—"the Palace of Art"—"the Two voices"—rise in their



diction to the region where all great styles—without imitation—resemble each other; where a line of Shakespeare may be taken for a line of Wordsworth, or a line of Tennyson for a line out of Lycidas. Great art has but one expression—the expression of nature. The secret of Tennyson's felicity of diction is the secret of natural poetry—just what I pointed out some pages back—just what makes our common version of the Bible grand poetic diction—namely, a recurrence to the primitive metaphors of speech, the painting by a word—in brief the imaginative use of words.

Observe the force of this which is taken from the Palace of Art—

“ The rangèd ramparts bright
From level meadow-bases of deep grass
Suddenly *scaled* the light.”

Here all the grandeur of this fine passage comes from the word which I have marked by Italics—a word so picturesque in its place that it positively comes upon the reader with a sensation of delight akin to surprise. But I am not writing an Essay on Tennyson. Leaving to my reader the pleasure of discovering how much he has advanced the style of the poets of our day, I will only gratify myself by setting down one other passage of his from the “*Idylls of the King*.”

“ He was mute :
So dark a forethought rolled about his brain,
As on a dull day in an Ocean cave
The blind wave feeling round his long sea-hall
In silence.”

Here is a grand thought expressed in the purest medium of imaginative language. In order to gain a true idea of the service which Wordsworth, and Tennyson, have rendered to poetry, let the student contrast the above passages, or any other of the best passages in the works of these two authors, with any stanza or line taken at random out of the works of a writer, great in his way, and who wrote the best of bad—I mean Gray. In the “Elegy written in a Country Churchyard” we find, in limine, lines which are defective by confusion.

“The curfew tolls* the knell of parting day”

leaves the world in ignorance, up to the present moment, whether “tolls” be a verb active or neuter, whether “the knell” be an accusative, or a nominative case. Again,

“Now fades the glimmering landscape on the sight,
And all the air a solemn stillness holds.”

Here we have in the short space of two lines an awkward inversion in “fades”—a bad common-place in “all the air”—and another piece of confusion as to whether the air holds the stillness, or the stillness holds the air. These slovenlinesses would not, I am happy to say, be endured at the present time. Neither would such a line as this

“And *all that* beauty, *all that* wealth e’er gave”

* In Bell’s British poets, there is no stop after “tolls.” If this be the correct reading, the line is a badly accented one.

be tolerated in a poem aiming at first-rate reputation. Indeed, I remark a general and an admirable tendency in our latest poetry, to eschew inversions, and abbreviations, and other so-called poetic licenses, which are only liberties with poetry that ought not to be taken.

With these "poetic licenses" disappear the whole wardrobe and stage-property of the Muse—a being who now wants no wardrobe, since her occupation, nay, herself, is gone. But, my dear Student, let me remind you that Poetry has always a stock-in-trade on hand, a repertory of common-places, which are not the less common-places from being different to those of a past generation. "Star-dust"—"Milk-snow"—"Cowslip faces"—"pearl-round ears"—and other modern paraphernalia—laudable in the first coiner perhaps, but sadly affected in the utterers of the coin—are just as much common-places as "the paths of glory" of Gray, or the "gloomy things" of Byron.

From the above rapid review of the rise, fall, and restoration of English poetic diction, springs, incidentally, a singular deduction—namely—that, whatever style true poets adopt, they are still poets. The gift, the sacred fire, whether it be burning in censers of gold, or in lamps of common clay, is still the same. We have seen Milton supreme, though grandiloquent: Pope, glorious though wrong: Gray justly immortal, though his diction is patch-work: We know that, when Tom Moore wrote—

"As half in shade, and half in sun
The world along its path advances,
May that side the sun's upon
Be all that ever meets thy glances,"

he wrote nonsense, (for who would not grow sick of and blind with constant sunshine?) Yet we also know that Tom Moore, though he mostly wrote in that untrue style, was a true poet. There is a great deal in an article being the best of its kind, even though that kind be not the best. Nay—fact more singular—we perceive, from many instances, that even common-place itself may become charming by happy position, and airy grace of utterance. Who does not feel this, when the following verses of Shenstone recur to his memory?

"I have found out a gift for my fair,
I have found where the wood-pigeons breed;
But let me that plunder forbear,
She will say 'twas a barbarous deed.
For he ne'er could be true, she averr'd,
Who could rob a poor bird of its young,
And I loved her the more when I heard
Such tenderness fall from her tongue."

From the feeling of pleasure which the mere ease of the above stanza gives us, we may advantageously take a lesson in catholicity of taste: Seeing that by narrowness we shut ourselves out from that world of innocent enjoyment, which man opens for himself by adding to the worship of the grand and beautiful an appreciation of the graceful and the lovely. The rose has been canonized by poets; but, out of doors, has not a buttercup also its poetry? The nightingale, if we place one

hundred as the standard of song, has ninety-nine good marks to the wren's nine; but is it not charming to hear the wren twitter in autumn? Beethoven is a giant of harmony; but who would banish from the stage that sweetest of common-places—the “Barbiere” of Rossini?

Of course I am not recommending the student of poetry to be an admirer of the middling-good in art, (there is no middling-good in nature,) for, were he so, his state would indeed be the reverse of “gracious;” but I affirm to him the benefit of a noble many-sidedness; of being unshackled by the fashions even of our own liberal era; of consenting not to confine the divine afflatus to any one mode of utterance.

These reflections lead to the point, where, in conclusion, I have something to say regarding the diction of my own poems.

As eras roll on, Poetry, like all Art, becomes more difficult to achieve: But especially the diction of poetry. In the regions of thought there are ever new subjects for thought; and the varying passions of men under new phases of society perpetually create new combinations for the poetic observer. It is not so with the dress of thought. Precisely that advanced state of civilization, which renders subject more rife, restricts the medium through which subject shall be presented. Upon early society the poet drew rough bills which were paid at sight. But the world has long grown fastidious, and scarcely endorses the most refined delicacies of expression. Besides, in a nation's poetic language, when once

it has been fixed, the complicated feelings evolved by an advanced state of society produce but little change. From the moment that a garb is invented, the cut of it is a mere matter of fashion: and fashion is not essential form. Since the time of Shakspeare the English standard of poetic diction remains much the same: and, unhappily, where poets have departed from it, they have only demonstrated that Language, having reached its highest development, can only push farther forward by monstrosity.

The increased number, also, of poets increases the difficulty of attaining in poetry to a style which shall, without distortion, be a man's own property. The virgin forests have been cleared away, and every rood of poet-land has now its settler upon it.

Then again. If an honest poet have a good memory, how difficult for him to forego a seducing expression, and even to eschew old-forgotten plunder, because he knows it to be the property of another! Yet this he must do, if he would keep faith with himself even more than with the public.

But while on these accounts original style in poetry becomes every day more difficult, the requisitions of the public from an author for original style, far from being relaxed, are more stringent than ever. The world demands originality, and especially originality of surface. No matter that the bullion be sterling; it must be minted anew.

Some cut short the question by stamping on their

coinage the head of the reigning king of poetry. So long as their verse has Cæsar's image and superscription, they are contented. But how shall he, who desires to be at once new and true, fulfil the requirements of the world? By posturing? working himself to frenzy? frothing at the mouth? Such methods of winning a moment's notoriety are themselves become stale; and were they still relished, to adopt them would be impossible for a true mind.

Nothing remains to the conscientious poet but to be himself. "Nothing" do I say? This "Nothing" is everything in difficulty. Conformity to some passing spasm of the day is easy work to it. Imitation of the old Dramatists is easy work to it. Showing the muscles of speech, as Fuseli shewed the muscles of clothed men and women, is easy work to it. Sledge-hammering with awful words is easy work to it. Eccentricity is very easy work to it. Yet this easy work must *not* be done. Vain work would it be, if done! Student, remain yourself, and you will be characteristic. Every leaf has its own physiognomy; how much more every man! But the branding iron of affectation seams down every face to one similitude.

With these convictions full upon me, I thought it was best to trust my style, as far as possible, to nature; to have my own hand-writing; to sing my own song, not the mock-bird's note; and, above all, to leave to my subject the office of moulding the expression of my thoughts.

And here, another requisition met me.

A philosophy of thought, which seeks to build itself in verse, is under different circumstances to other kinds of poetry. No sensuous bodiment of the imagination, but the thought itself stands principal here; and whatever is calculated to draw attention from the thought must be resolutely foregone by him who aspires to be an artist in this sphere. The "*materiem superat opus*" must never be his bane. He must seek a clear transparent medium for his thought, and there rest satisfied.

But, when a philosophy of thought takes the prefix "religious," (perhaps a pleonasm—for is not all philosophy religious?) the poet's responsibilities and the call upon him for self-abnegation are increased.

The task which I had chosen for my life-long labour was of a nature too sacred to admit of my trying upon it experiments for the sake of effect. I wished to comfort men; to supply them with reasons for being comforted under this world's burthen and mystery; to suggest such little trains of thought as I had myself found effectual, in the hour of doubt and sorrow, for creating trust in better things: to add to the more serious portions of my volume some lighter pieces, which might follow nature's lyric method of hinting at God's hidden beauty, and which, once read, might sometimes float into the mind like a remembered melody.

Thus I had to rise to a region higher even than that to which the Spur of Fame—noble as it is—can

elevate the "clear-spirit;" and to dwell, permanently if possible, in those better moods of mind in which a man, if he can cheer a few human hearts, is content to die comparatively unknown.

Reader! For you are the following and concluding words.

I had something to say to you, and I wished to say it clearly and well. I wished to please you, but not at the expense of a higher aim. For your sake, I put aside the conjuring trick of poetry for the toil of the easy-difficult—for the dearly-cherished hope of holding communion, in clear terms, with your higher nature. For your sake, never have I written a line that sprung not from inner impulse, nor left a line so written without submitting it to the long ordeal of my judgment. Perhaps, Reader, I thought I should please you better so. God alone knows motives. Farewell.

PROLOGUE.

PROLOGUE.

THREE Rivers were there, as old fables say,
Encircling Hell, coil'd one within the other ;
And souls that went into a future world
Were forced to pass them all, even to gain
Elysium. Three heaven-high Walls there were,
(This also is a legend of old days)
Which in concentric circles guarded round,
Within a dusky grove, a golden plant,
Which whoso touch'd straightway immortal grew,
And happy. The three Walls had each one Gate,
And that one Gate was difficult to find :
Only the true could see it, and some wander'd
For ever on the outside, seeking it,


Or haply caring not to pass within,
Or saying they had past in when they had not.
These antique tales are shadows of great truths.
Elysium, ev'n the dimmest life of Hades,
Or golden fruit of immortality,
These are not won, unless by him who passes
Successively through three great Gates of soul.

The "Mystery of Evil" is the First ;
A Gate of woe, to which Life's pilgrim is
Soon marshall'd by his own sad beating heart.
Then, as he issues from the gloomy arch,
Too terribly instructed, he, perchance,
Half drops his personal sorrow, and his breast,
As waters turn to mirrors when they're sullen,
Reflects the whole world's weary wretchedness,
The thwarted order, and the broken law,
The death-struck earth, whose very plants decay,
As if to match the ruin and the rot
Of higher sentient things. Then doth he pant
To justify to man's intelligence
God for His dread arrangements ; and to add
One grain of thought unto the spiritual orb,

Which Reason, who redeems bewilderment,
Harmonious frames both out of, and within
The visible chaos of this tossing life.
Calm'd by the effort, he more cheerfully
Then speeds upon his journey.

The next Gate
Is "Love,"—the pure, the bright, the beautiful;
Whose tender shadow is but softer light,
That, as it falls upon the pilgrim-soul,
Smiles out the anguish, and distrust of God:
And Love, the human, to the heavenly leads
Through regions not unblest.

Then, the Third Gate,
Whose dear inscription is "The Law of Love,"
Shines glorious on th' unswerving traveller;
A Gate, which, if the true one—for the false
Is made of cumbrous granite-blocks of Creeds
Fetch'd from bleak wastes of soul—is built of gems
Whose names to utter is a luxury,
Whose beauty is a type of inner wealth,
Sapphires of Faith, great emeralds of Hope,



Rubies of Fervor, topazes of Purenness,
The very substances and founts of Day,
Whose beams come blended to the outer world
In one great whiteness, till the prism of Love
Divides them to themselves.

He, who shall never
Pass these three Gates of Trouble, Love, and Law,
Led by the torch of his own conscious will,
At other minds unkindled, is at best
A glittering garment of humanity,
Not the same being, who, when God made man
Of the dust of the ground, and breath'd into his nostrils
The breath of life, became a living soul.

THE FIRST GATE.

THE MYSTERY OF EVIL.

"The heavy and the weary weight
Of all this unintelligible world."

WORDSWORTH.

THE MYSTERY OF EVIL.

I.

“ WHAT fear so quails thee, miserable man ?”
With these strange words, which came methought from me,
Yet from another, my dark dream began.
I stood upon a waste without a tree,
In this my vision, where the eye could see
Dry desolation to the horizon's line.
Crusted with salt the whole earth seem'd to be.
Even the pools of water had the shine
Of salt, and did with thoughts of endless thirst combine.

Before me stood a man, whose tottering legs
Were but as those of some lean animal
Hastily fashion'd from creation's dregs.
Huge-headed was he, yet of stature small ;
Black — naked — propp'd upon a staff withal.
This abject thing kept trembling on before
Me — the white man. And now his gestures call
Compassion from me ; and his eyes run o'er
With tears, that on the ground like plashing rain-drops pour.

Fear took me. I was prison'd round with doubt—
A wilder'd spirit in a human shape—
All I had known of earth was wipèd out ;
So, with amazement dumb, I stood agape
Eyeing that man, scarce nobler than an ape,
As if I had not heard of savages,
But, wreck'd upon some new creation's cape,
Conceived no more than naked vision sees ;
Yet gleams of thought lit up my soul by slow degrees.


Just then a Presence, felt but undescried,
Murmur'd these accents gently in my ear,
“ I am God's Angel—sent to be thy Guide
(For as a stranger thou art wandering here)
About this intricate and tangled sphere
Which men call Earth. I have to fill thy being
With the dark mystery—Sorrow—which thy clear
Spirit yet knows not—and to help thy seeing
With supernatural light, when thy own ray is fleeing.

“ Thou, as a soul to be incorporate
In human clay, must, by half-human view,
Have prescient glimpses of the mortal state,
And Life's dark plan through all its parts pursue,
Large agonies, inlaid with pleasures few,
That so, when thou indeed shalt tread life's maze,
Thou mayest not with quivering senses new
Accost the anguish of those troubled ways,
Nor blast with hated forms thy unfamiliar gaze.

“For Sorrow is Life’s problem ! And indeed
The highest of created beings may
Marvel that God should bid His creatures bleed
At heart, and agonise their lives away,
And yet be call’d a God of goodness ! Nay,
Doubt not His goodness !— Fierce shall be thy strife
Even to dream why, unto sentient clay,
Torn in the great dissecting-room of life,
If sorrow needs must come, it cuts with such keen knife.”

Then, suddenly, as if my breast became
A glass, wherein great wonders grew and swell’d,
I at a glance perceived the solid frame
Of a vast continent, and, there reveal’d,
Saw thousands like the man I first beheld.
I knew their arts, their barbarous polity,
Nor were their pains and wants from me conceal’d.
Hunger and thirst, beneath a burning sky,
Vex’d them, and kept them low, and made them prone to die.

Their herbless sands themselves did emblemise.
Poor were their virtues, and their vices rude :
Over the weak the strong did tyrannise ;
Men spear’d the women in their angry mood ;
The women, in their youth nor meek nor good,
In age were devilish, and with demon-songs
Would hound the men to hellish deeds of blood.
No higher nature to their view belongs :
No ties of gentle love unite their roving throngs.



Yet something of a rude content they had ;
And the free feeling that their foot was set
On their own land made life to them half-glad,
Though harsh. But now my inner gaze hath met
A nation of invaders that would get
Into their hands the wild man's heritage :
And God might seem these robbers to abet ;
For, wheresoe'er unequal war they wage,
They bind the native fast, or blot him from life's page.

And this begetteth rage and treachery
Within the bosom of the savage man.
Fear is a spur to deeds of bloody dye,
And Friendship oft doth mask some murderous plan
Of vengeance, nurst by the uncultur'd clan.
Now, could I tell the horrors that I saw,
I would not. Everywhere the blight and ban
Of lawless deeds, and worse pretext of law
Wither'd the land, and smote my soul with dreary awe.

" O God," I cried, " whom reminiscent beams
Paint to my spirit one with happiness,
Where art thou now, amidst these monstrous dreams
Which like realities upon me press ?"
But then the voice behind me, bodiless,
Murmur'd to me, " Judge not before the time !"
Which words, with grace I knew not, did repress
My passionate thoughts, as if they were a crime,
And I had strength still up Earth's mountain-woes to climb.

Crush of old races—filling of the chasm
With new marauders—still those portents were
Before me. Transmutation's fiery spasm
Heaven to its creatures did not stint or spare.
A law it seem'd of nature—that, where'er
The stranger came, the children of the soil
Should agonising shrink, and disappear
Into the dust, ground down by forceful toil,
Till all their land became the unjust invader's spoil.

Such things I saw, within my bosom's glass,
From times of the fanatic Israelite
To ruffian days of Cortez, frown and pass,
Aye, of soft modern moments cloud the light;
And "Annexation" was a word I might
Hear oftener hurl'd, the turbid air to vex,
As I and the world's hour did more unite.
"Tis purely for your welfare we annex!"
Were also floating sounds that did my mind perplex.

The Angel murmur'd, "Now before thine eye
Are emptied forth three vials of earth's woe;
The curse of primitive barbarity—
The poor barbarian kill'd by conquest's throe—
Life civilised—which soon to thee must show
How new up-shootings ancient growths replace,
How over ruin the green grass doth grow
With flowers and weeds—some beautiful, some base,
Some gorgeously vile—till earth has changed her face!

"Of life barbarian, and of life refined
 Group now the contrasts. With wide scope discern
 If savage miseries most afflict mankind,
 Or the soft ills that fill Refinement's urn!"
 Thus monish'd, the soul's telescope I turn
 From one land to another. Now I see
 'Midst pitiless crowds a youthful widow burn
 By some drear custom, which is call'd Suttee
 In realms where the hot sun breeds hotter cruelty.

Now, in an island beat by ocean vast,
 An old man and his sons my dream hath found :
 Naked and savage are they as the blast
 That with their voices mingles its hoarse sound,
 And bears to me the old man's wail half-drown'd,
 While shriek his children, " You have lived too long !
 And now we bury you beneath the ground
 You cumber. Solemn is our law and strong
 That you, entomb'd alive, should expiate your wrong."

The scene is changed. A forest meets my view,
 A virgin forest, that hath ages writ
 Upon its brow. Fierce men of dusky hue
 About a fire, in gloomy conclave, sit,
 Or dark before the glowing embers flit.
 They hold a foeman, and to torture him
 Task ingenuity of savage wit.
 The women, deadliest in inventions grim,
 Prompt the dread work, or aid to tear the quivering limb.

'Tis not enough these fiends a foeman have
 To wring and torture with their hellish art ;
 A dearer, keener luxury they crave —
 To force a cry from out his fainting heart.
 Long time, the cruel pangs that through him dart
 The strong brave victim silently controls :
 But, lo ! a beldame thinks of a new smart ;
 Scoops out his eyes, and puts in two live coals.
 He shrieks ! They shout with joy ! Low in the dust he rolls !

" Ah sure ! " I cried, recoiling from the sight,
 " Barbarian life man's keenest misery is ! "
 The Angel said : " These outer ills are light
 As summer-vapour — aye ! are very bliss,
 Measured with pangs that in the soul's abyss
 Sink endless. What are flames and funeral pyre
 But weakest shadows, which the substance miss,
 Of man's internal agony and fire ?
 Young art thou in this lore ! Now learn thy lesson nigher ! "

I felt, on this, my introspective ken
 Read the whole life of a poor widow'd one,
 Whose lot was cast 'midst smooth, fair-spoken men,
 In a far pallid island. She had none
 To help her or defend ; all ill was done
 Against her by cold villains who contrive
 To plunder her, and from her youthful son
 Wrench his just right — then keep them just alive
 That they might pray to die, yet still with torture strive.

Another widow rose unto my view,
Young, rich, and childless. Soon a villain gay
Entrapp'd her heart. How she the hour did rue
When she to him her hand had given away!
Her wealth once his, he paused not to betray
His hard cold nature, and her tender breast
Mourn'd o'er his vile desertion day by day.
Yet still she lov'd him, though with bitter zest,
Despising her fond heart that could not hate nor rest.

Yet a third widow did my eye behold,
Who danced along in silk and jewels rare.
But, when I look'd into her bosom cold,
Methought the anguish of the former pair
Had less of sadness than her careless care,
Their loving torture than her loveless blank—
Her blank of weary nothingness, yet where
All jealousies and discontentments rank
In stifling silence grew, and rotted as they sank.

Then did the Angel in my ear suspire,
“Which, thinkèst thou, the sadder doom may be—
That of the widow burnt in actual fire,
Or of the spiritually tortured three?
Had these not better have been dealt Suttee,
Wrench'd out at once from this world's drear sojourn,
Than chain'd so long to mortal misery?
Perhaps thine eye more beauty may discern
In death that ends life's pain, than life that lives to mourn.”

"But thou hast only shown me," I exclaim'd,
"In culture's realm the anguish of the weak,—
The woes of women, half by nature tamed,
Ready to suffer wrong, subdued and meek.
Surely, if we 'midst men our knowledge seek,
We in the gentle than the barbarous land
Shall find less social woe?" Thus did I speak,
Half doubtingly, by some vexation fann'd,
And anxious to redeem what seem'd the fairer strand.

The Angel left me not that starveling hope.
"The savage nature," he half-scornful said,
"Lies straight and open in its savage scope,
Rules by brute strength, and striketh weakness dead.
But, in domains which Policy doth wed,
Full oft the weak weave thralldom for the strong—
A net of evil work'd in double thread.
E'en women civilised return the wrong
Which men upon them heap barbarian tribes among.

"Rude nations let not a bride's face be seen
By stinted bridegroom until wedding-day,—
A custom which, unwittingly I ween,
Is shared by countries more refined than they.
Knows yonder youth the bride he leads away
From gilded altar? Hath he seen her face
Of soul? her body in its true display?
Nay, let him wait till from her folds of lace
Steps forth the real bride bestow'd on his embrace!

“ Soon shall he find there is no screen so dense
As the soft vapour of a half-revealing,
Which hides the evil to delude the sense,
And shows the good to set the fancy reeling.
Behold what clouds are o’er the bridegroom stealing,
Even in the freshness of the spousal bower,
As drops the bride her mask of fond concealing!
He sees her true! Oh, miserable hour!
Yet still she smiles abroad, and but at home doth lower.

“ And courtly life is full of these low coils,
Arms of the feeble, pitfall treacheries,
Which take the generous spirit in their toils,
And are a sorrow e’en to angels’ eyes.
When treachery breaketh from her smooth disguise,
’Tis the deception gives the keenest wound:
Therefore some mortals, haply but half wise,
Yet seeing dimly to a deeper ground,
Have than the polish’d man the savage nobler found.”

“ And yet the Savage hath his cunning, too!”
I said: whereat, in words, the Angel smiled;
“ The Savage hath his cunning, it is true,
But ’tis the simple cunning of a child.
Yet praise I not the tenant of the wild;
Nothing I judge; my mission here is rife
Only with open truths unreconciled.
I have to show thee this world’s equal strife,
And how more complex ills come with more complex life.”

“ But,” I persisted, “ they who did inearth
Their sires alive —— ” “ Destroy’d not with worst dooms,”
Broke in my Guide, “ the authors of their birth.
Some sons of luxury dig drearier tombs
For their begetters! In gay, gorgeous rooms,
Explore the filial heart, and see how there
The blighting wish, the cold neglect consumes
The old, of whom the young aweary are,
And whom they crush by words, and bury in despair.

“ Think not the Savage, who in woods doth roam,
The wisest, nor the worst of torturers;
Let him go learn in sleek Refinement’s home
The pang that’s slowest, and most keenly stirs —
How polish’d man his long revenge defers,
Till unexpected in the breast it quiver;
How he prepareth Calumny’s cold slurs,
Faint-breath’d within the sentient heart to shiver,
And how he drop by drop wrings out the blood’s warm river!”

As spoke the Angel, life’s external woe
Held me less captive, and I dimly made
’Twixt upper torture and the pang below
Dark parallels. Yet so a deeper shade
Opprest my soul. I saw the beauty fade
Which cultured realms had beam’d upon my look.
I only knew—howe’er with pomp array’d—
That man was man: and, as the ague-struck
Shiver in sunshine, I from brightness sorrow took.

To me, who poised the world by equal sight,
What matter'd if, in some low jungle stream,
The babe was drown'd with ceremonial rite,
Or, in some river, cultivation's theme,
Whose shores with life, whose waves with commerce teem,
Were plunged, *against* the law, by the wild hands
Of famine-stricken mother? As my dream
Reveal'd me more the ways of many lands,
The billows of my thought threw up more shifting sands.

So could I not by sight, nor e'en by guess,
The favourite home of happiness espy;
Where'er the outer misery was less,
The inner had more light to read it by.
Where gold heaps glitter'd, ruin too was nigh,
And the fierce fever of accurst desire
Rush'd on to blood, and nature's broken tie:
If deserts were replaced by dome and spire,
Men's passions, more and more, were wallowing in the mire.

I mourn'd these mischiefs; yet within me rose
Strange fiery instincts—impulses to be
Equal partaker of those stirring woes,
Which shook me with mysterious sympathy.
Full sure I felt a human heart in me,
Which own'd its kindred with life's wild mutation:
And I cried out; "Ye men, would I were free
To dart myself into your desolation,
So I might gain for you some touch of restoration!"

“ Oh, that I could be scatter'd as a seed,
That's nothing in itself, and dies in springing,
So might I only blossom as a weed
Which to one human heart one joy were bringing !
Then my far way in gladness I were winging ;
But now I droop ! What is my hopeful use ?
Not e'en as much as of yon bird that's singing,
For he is heard at least ! ” This plaint did loose
My bosom, and I smiled because of sorrow's truce.


Sudden, my senses felt a touch of joy.
I saw the Earth itself—how beautiful—
The mere material Earth ! There came a coy,
Reluctant pleasure, my past pains to dull,
As I from land to land the sweets did cull
By vision. Yet mere sight sufficed me not :
I long'd to touch the beauty, and to lull
My weary spirit in some folded spot
Whose peace I could make mine. The Angel read my thought,

And softly said, “ Roam where thou wilt some while ! ”
Then in a tropic forest I plunged deep.
Great heaven, how all things there did grow and smile,
And quiver, and to warm existence leap !
Gorgeous the trees : the flowers were as a heap
Of hue and bloom, and tangled ravishment.
Fragrance had there her fountain, which did steep
My being in its own. Through my green tent
Birds, bright as happy thoughts, flash'd wonder as they went.

And then I sat me down beside the sea,
The tropic sea! Oh, azure, azure blue
It was! The diamond waves entrancingly
Did to a little isle lead on my view,
Where beam'd white palaces, and palm-trees grew
Tier over tier—a gorgeous pyramid.
On sea and isle the sky its treasure threw
Of blue-gold beauty, which did softly thrid
The air with misty warmth, and passion strong, yet hid.

But, like a man made dainty by excess
Of sumptuous joy, and lavish festival,
I turn'd to climates of a humbler dress,
To which some dim, soft memory seem'd to call
And draw me fondly, as a mother shall
Her own true child.—What is it I behold?
A smooth green lawn, a little waterfall
Recess'd in trees, and lapt in valley-fold;
A spot that moved me much;—it seem'd well-known of old.

And there I gaze, the space of one long day,
One summer day, watching a sportive boy,
Who with wild, gleeful step did bound and stray
About those bowers; yet sometimes did employ
Himself in graver and more thoughtful joy.
And I beheld his eyes dilate and glow
When flush'd the streaky eve, or with alloy
Of twilight her soft colours faded slow,
While into song the nightingale did overflow.



I read within his heart: its throbbings said,
"How lovely is this world—how good, how fair!"
And for the moment my own bosom made,
Like his, an orison transcending prayer:
Then unto me strange memory did repair,
That I and that same child had once been one.
But soon again I changed to cloudy care,
Feeling how evil knowledge had o'erspun
My spirit, so that I far from myself had run.

And then I had dim glimpses of a youth
Who loved. Ah me, how lovely was the maid
To whom was dedicate his first warm truth!
She had dark hair, smooth on her forehead laid—
Her ivory forehead!—and an ebon braid
Went back to each small ear. But, ah, the girl
Was fortuneless! His mother was dismay'd
By his adoring love, and strove to furl
Into a dark deep shade his passion's eddying whirl.

By art she vanquish'd; and the glow was damp'd.
But not so lightly did that youthful pair
Escape the doom that on their souls was stamp'd.
Each went a different way: each wedded, where
The cold, cold breast had in the bond no share,
Beings that were as alien to their lot
As blasts of winter to the southern air,
The boy lived on: at least so mortals thought;
But I saw both were dead—so henceforth name them not!

“Was I—or shall I be—that child at play,
That youth who loved?” Into that thought intense
The torrent of my soul was swept away:
When, lo! the Angel’s voice, as through the dense
Dark covering of a cloud, did pierce my sense,
Saying, “Arise! we have rough things to heed!
Take to thine eye Reality’s stern lens!
Enough has Fancy sway’d thee! though indeed
Not all is mist or dream which lately thou didst read.

“These later visions scarce were of my choice.
In them a deeper knell for thee hath sounded
Than the mere promptings of an Angel’s voice.
They are a Fate, by other Fates surrounded,
A doom that finds thee when thou shalt be bounded
By human life, where lines unnumber’d cross
Unnumber’d lines, that strangely seem confounded
By laws of chance that wildly heave and toss,
Till but God’s eye can see which conquers—Gain or Loss.

“Yet take this comfort with thee on thy way
Through moral mischief. The material world
Is fair—thou hast felt it was! so, when thy ray
Of happiness to deepest night is hurl’d,
This costly thought within thy breast be furl’d,
There is a sun that shines, a heaven that’s blue,
Dear flowers, and grass with morning dew impearl’d;
Then think, if all too much this world thou rue,
God has not made it fair without an end in view.

“ Look onward, and be strong ! God Himself scorns
The coward heart ! Outspread thy folded wings !
Dare to believe, though Earth so darkly mourns,
That the rich beauties which abroad she flings
Are hints and promises of better things :
That mortal foulness and unspiritual leaven
Work ever up to lofty blossomings ;
Till man and nature to one height have striven,
And Earth uplift her face to meet the kiss of heaven ! ”

II.

“BEHOLD another woe!” the Angel said.
When, lo, the beauty and the bloom of earth
Were with a ghastly pallor overspread,
And buried deep beneath light’s saddening dearth.
As thou hast seen, when, on their evening hearth,
The great snow-mountains have lit up their fires;
Sudden the glow goes out, like ill-timed mirth;
Green tints steal on; the rosy hue retires;
And Nature the lorn look of some chill corpse acquires

“Now on thy vision,” said my Guide, “is thrown,
If not the worst, Creation’s widest woe—
The woe of sentient creatures prey’d upon
Ever by others, ’till the tidal flow
Of devastation can no further go,
But dieth out on Nothing’s midnight shore.
And, first, I to thine obvious eye will show
Of this dark anguish the material store:
Behold Destruction’s work, that worketh evermore!”

I look'd—Oh horror!—What did I descry?
Worlds upon worlds, devouring and devour'd—
No second of time without its butchery,
Atoms by atoms crush'd as soon as flower'd!
Even a drop of water was empower'd
To be a field of havoc infinite:
My gaze, with terrible acuteness dower'd,
Learn'd to despise the grosser things of sight,
And find in smallness' self God's most colossal might.

I saw the whale, only by breathing, stifle
Millions of sentient animalculæ.
I saw the fowls of air at one swoop rifle
A universe of glad ephemeræ.
But the foul sight I loathèd most to see
Was the slow torture that Earth's meaner tribes
On nobler growths, as if avengingly,
Ever inflicted. Language scarce describes
Those miserable woes—Creation's very gibes.

In waters deep the pike devour'd his prey
Right royally; but on his martyr'd head
Sat a small toad that clung to him alway
With crookèd claws, howe'er he chafed and fled,
And on the juices of his eyeballs fed.
I saw the generous elephant rush by,
Madden'd by insects in his trunk that bred;
I saw the lion vanquish'd by the fly,
Which in his nostrils raged, and nested quiveringly.

With these base underpangs how ill agreed
A certain varnish of eternal bliss!
The Bee might seem in luxury to feed
That woke the blossoms with her morning kiss;
But her gay dance was not all joy, I wis!
For round her neck small vile tormentors cling:
Nor tender butterflies their torture miss,
E'en when they seem to sport upon the wing;
By sly Ichneumon pierced, their life is but a sting.

"Yes," said the Angel, "Life's equivalent
Is Death! Life dieth into substance new;
Creation's very cause is Nutriment!"
"A fearful cause!" I cried; then raised my view
To see how man was nourish'd. Did he too
Crush lives to live, or but aërial germs?
Oh vanity! He was the alembic, through
Whose mighty mouth distill'd all Matter's forms!
Great Nature's grave he was: himself but food for worms!

Not for his mere existence to provide
Man to himself the pith of all things gain'd,
He for his superfluity and pride
The flowing life-blood of Creation drain'd,
And to invent new ravage ever strain'd
His cruel fancy. In wild overflow
Of mischief he, for wanton sport, profaned
The world beneath him. Soon I learnt to know
For every joy of man some creature paid its woe.

Heavily the great pressure from the top
Accumulate on lower beings leant;
There was no cause the misery should stop:
Beasts suffer'd: but men cried, in their content,
"God gave them us, to eat, or to torment!"
How horses sweated on a holiday!
What myriad oxen into banquets went!
But Sophistry could varnish this, and say
Brute creatures cannot feel as learned doctors may.

Then there was much benevolence—of words.
A worshipful society there was
To punish cruelty to th' animal herds.
They seized upon the wretch who beat his ass,
But did the royal battue overpass;
And when crown'd heads—without the brains of course—
Blazed at a bull-fight, or a stag did chase
For the tenth time, Fame bawl'd herself quite hoarse
To publish such high deeds with due applauding force.

Then said the Civilised, "How great we are!
How highly raised above the savage brood!
We for amusement to the chase repair,
They out of hunger, and sheer lack of food!"
"Yet," said the Angel, "works in either blood
Destruction's instinct, which, sophisticate,
Bears fruits more truly barbarous than when rude,
For, undiseased, 'tis preservation's mate,
And crowns with self-support the hunter's natural state."

To gauge man's pride of sport much toil I spent :
 Yet deeply more I task'd myself to spy
 The under-grounds of an accomplishment
 Call'd by the polish'd nations—"Cookery,"
 Which, if conducted with due agony
 Of objects cook'd, made e'en rude realms arrive
 At blandest arts, and best philosophy.
 Calves bled to death caused moral good to thrive,
 And high Refinement's point was—Lobsters boil'd alive !

But could I wonder at these human gambols
 Play'd off on animals ? Men, worse than wolves,
 Men, the great butchers of creation's shambles,
 Were very beasts of prey amongst themselves.
 'Twas not enough their larders and their shelves
 Heap'd alien spoils of earth, and air, and water,
 Pitfalls for kindred lives their fury delves.
 "Yet," said the Angel, "sometimes this dread slaughter
 Must be more wept than loath'd—Necessity's pale daughter.

"Where hunger hovers o'er Fuego's strands
 I call thy gaze !" With shuddering pity then
 I saw the dreariest of all dreary lands :
 Look where I would, came nothing to my ken
 But sea-beat rock, and rain-afflicted fen,
 Where low-hung clouds made day a ghastlier night,
 And there a race of miserable men
 Dragg'd on existence—scarce in living plight—
 For things that life sustain scarce met their craving sight.

And, as the crude slab mussel of the rock
And thin root fail'd them, cruel eyes they roll'd
Upon each other. To preserve the stock
Of this lean nation, 'tis their women old
And feeble, who must die by slaughter cold
To furnish feasts abhorr'd. The fated ones,
Long ere they die, their coming doom behold.
They pray for life—they kneel before their sons—
In vain! The famish'd heart no deed of horror shuns.

“Now hoard thy tears for deeper tragedies!”
Exclaim'd the Angel. “Northward set thy face;
And into yon huge city plunge thine eyes,
Which holds within itself a populace
Surpassing many a nation. Therein trace
How not the sinews and the flesh alone
Of his own kind man feeds on!—For a space
Behold him fatten on the sigh and groan,
And dry up others' hearts the more to glut his own!

“To this keen drainage of life's hidden wells
What is the vampyre's slumberous robbery
Which late I saw thee, 'midst the stifling dells
Of burning climes, with curious glance espy!
The bird brings death with tender lullaby,
And fans the victim with his cooling wing,
But, when the human vampyre bids men die,
He doth their very sleep with torture sting,
And counteth each low sob of conscious suffering.

“ Is it not so,” the Angel further said,
“ That in the animal world no type is found
Of rifling malice, or of butchery dread,
That is not with a worse perfection crown’d
In man himself? How, through his realm, abound
Leeches that suck, yet ne’er disgorge their gain!
What vile ichneumons lay their eggs around
In hearts, that soon shall teem with bastard pain:
What Ant-lions lowly hid their heedless prey obtain!”

These words well sorted with the stealthy work
They drew. I saw the plunderer and his prize;
All human spiders that in dark dens lurk,
And weave their sightless webs for silly flies;
The gambling cheat; the banker rich in lies,
And nothing else; the harlot, who doth join
Revenge on man to greedy merchandise,
With countless tribes that plunder or purloin,
And out of sloth itself abhorrent labour coin.

I saw the robber, who could choke or stun
By sudden throttle, or quick rearward blow.
Small gains allured him! Murder he had done
To snatch a few poor pence from hungry woe.
I saw a secret band to butchery go,
Who from a mother stole her only boy,
Because a market for his teeth they know,
(Oh, how were they his mother’s pride and joy!)
And sold his corpse piecemeal—then spread some new decoy.

Yet direr were a class of murderers sage
Who dealt round poisons—not that they might speed
Quicker unto some wealthy heritage,
But, in a small way, daily fortune breed :
Adulterators of whate'er can feed
Mortals, or slake their thirst ! Perhaps the knife
Had more of mercy, in its ready deed
Of blood, than this destruction without strife,
Which charged with lingering death the pure well-heads of life.

“Come, buy my book !” Oh method innocent
To live, which costs the reader but a yawn !
Innocent, too, the tumbler, whose descent
From six-piled chairs the ready pence has drawn !
But what art thou, whom Slander's rabid spawn
Supports—who, but to sell thy newspaper,
Dost draw thy neighbour's honour into pawn ?
Or thou, smooth-spoken, gilded usurer,
Whose chariot, truly seen, would be the widow's bier ?

The Angel said, “All thou dost now discern
Is bounded. Turn to wrongs thou canst not count !
From plunder'd scores to plunder'd millions turn,
And drink thy sorrows from an ocean-fount !
Levied upon the people, taxes mount
To mighty heaps : and any pain that kills
The common heart, lifts up a giant front
That dwarfs the altitude of private ills,
And out of it to heaven a blacker cloud distils.

“ Not murderous force, but fair, law-sanction'd sin
Eats realms, and is a canker at their core :
For how shall Remedy her work begin
When what should cure envenometh the sore ?
If salt have lost its savour, it no more
Keeps from pollution the fermenting mass.
Society's true pest would'st thou explore,
Let life's low villains from thy vision pass,
And lift thine eye to see rogues of a lofty class ! ”

Quick at the mandate, with new powers I saw
Into great halls, where men in ermine throve
By thralling crowds in wondrous nets of law.
There, long to get their own the wretched strove,
And from Hope's self a shroud for Hope enwove,
Wherein she might be buried. Wise ones there
Said secretly, “ 'T would be the Devil who drove
Were Justice ragged as her clients are ;
So Justice must be paid, to keep her sleek and fair ! ”

Thereon I murmur'd, “ When men cannot pay
For justice, have they not, by human right,
Justice unpaid for ? Do not states always
Hold all they govern equal in their sight ? ”
The Angel said, “ Thou dream'st of primal light,
And happy regions where thy being rose !
But in these realms Justice is blind as night,
And being blind sees not the harm she does ! —
Yet I worse pomps than these of plunder can disclose ! ”

Then was my view to choice assemblies led,
Whence to the crowd strange plagues, as blessings, steal.
Methought Society's huge bloated head
Sent poison ever to the wasted heel.
Truly there was much talk of public weal!
But, how to oil the creaking state-machine
By moisture squeezed out of the poor man's meal,
Or sale of filthy vices, was, I ween,
All that the flowery words, when stripp'd of flowers, did mean.

“Make up the budget!” Oft that cry I hear,
And mark high men for starving folks devise
Temptation, and cheap ways to check the tear,
And hunger's pang. I saw a palace rise,
By night, where flaring lights attract the eyes.
'Tis a dispensary of hellish drink,
Which hath a power to stifle agonies
Only to bid them in the bosom sink
Deeper; and hurl the wretch, it soothes, o'er ruin's brink.

Then one said whining, “'Tis the drunken sin
Lies at the bottom of the crowd's distress!”
“Fool!” cried another, “What drives men to gin?
I'll tell thee! 'Tis their great bleak wretchedness!
Dost blame them for their hour of glad excess?
Nature is kinder! She her stores doth heap
Of dizzying plants, and fruits, whence man may press
Drinks of sweet madness, juices rich in sleep,
That fondly points the way to rest more long and deep!”

To drown that voice, Earth's rulers council'd high
How best to cure the ills themselves had made :
Slipping about the question greasily,
" 'Tis Education hinders vice ! " they said ;
" So let us educate the lower grade ! "
" Hush ! Not so fast ! " breath'd one with prudent word :
" Talk, but not do ! for fear we spoil our trade
Of Tommy-shops and Hell-kitchens ! " So stirr'd
The murmur round, till " Ways and Means " was all I heard.

A mighty social element call'd " Work "
Now to itself my musing spirit draws,
Which the great few found privilege to shirk :
For what had they to do with Nature's laws ?
While some have toil that night shall scarcely pause,
Others I see whose hands are white with rest,
Whose faces shine with sleep, whose ravenous maws
Absorb the labours of a race opprest,
A race that only lives to line another's nest.

These partial contrasts most to me were bared
In lands I leapt to over tropic seas ;
There I beheld how ill the workers fared,
How well the idler who absorb'd their ease.
For him, cool fans, cool drinks, cool lattices,
Cool fountains made the very sunbeam sweet ;
They, in the field, without a shade or breeze,
Toil'd on : and, if they sunk beneath the heat,
An overseer's whip soon lash'd them to their feet.

“ This bondage of obligèd servitude,”
My teacher said, “ hath Slavery for its name :
But names are nothing ! Rather thou conclude
Unwholesome labour is the slavish shame.
Revert thine eye to lands whence last it came !
There see how Freedom tasks her sons to toil
In crowded dwellings, bent o’er loom and frame
’Midst loud machines, that whirl in fierce turmoil,
And often crush the wretch they tangle in their coil.”

Then I beheld a house called “ Factory,”
Where of the few to swell the pamper’d lot
The many toil — man, woman, girl and boy —
Cramm’d thick together. How they reek and rot
In soul and body, by foul contact hot !
At night I mark’d them as they falter’d home ;
No joy to them their ended labour brought :
The very children did not play or roam :
To-day was on their souls : to-morrow was to come !

“ Toil is life’s element and primal plan,
Which mortals call God’s curse,” the Angel said.
“ Man makes the curse ! When God proclaim’d to man,—
‘ In the sweat of thy brow thou shalt eat bread !’
The Almighty meant not sweat of heart instead !
There was a blessing in that doom of His !
When Labour’s task by Liberty is sped,
Sweet is the hour when Rest and Labour kiss :
But of imprison’d toil who measures the abyss ?”

Despite the Angel, men whose toil was talk
Thought factory hours made pleasure's choicest day,
So factory-men of shorten'd labour balk
From mere affection to their fellow-clay.
How to tax sinews most with least of pay
Was their true aim : yet, in their wordy flow,
The game of meek benevolence they play,
Point to some wrong abolish'd long ago,
And boast that modern times nor rack nor thumbscrew know.

“ And yet thou hast seen little !” said my Guide,
“ Take off the roofs of the vast city by
Thy inward vision : see what misery, wide
And deep, and crowded, meets the spiritual eye !
What dens give up their mass of agony,
Where, that the wretched may have means to live,
Thousands more wretched their heart's blood supply,
And their wrung souls unto the torturer give,
Who yet enjoyeth not his curst prerogative !”

·I look'd, and saw—scaling the upper air—
Large but low rooms, made hot by human breath :
Here men close-pack'd, poor crowded women there
The needle ply, while every stitch is death.
“ Grind, grind them down !” a dreary lean voice saith ;
“ They bring me little profit !” Then to note
What bloated flesh all this flesh nourisheth,
I strain'd my gaze, which splendour faintly smote,
The master-tailor's pomp from me was so remote.

Piercing to drearier and more drear abodes,
I look'd into a loathly tenement,
Where man was housed with water-newts and toads ;
For the furr'd rafters over green pools leant,
Where, if the rat plunged, phosphor-lights were sent
Through crannies, rife with fever evermore :
Yet there each night were festering lodgers pent,
And men and women on the filthy floor
Lay pack'd like one vast bale from Misery's rotten store.

Then the great City her last depths laid bare
To me ; and her dark mysteries unlock'd
Of pavement-trap, and slippery cellar-stair,
And bins, with human wretchedness o'erstock'd—
A city in themselves : night vaults, that mock'd
Despair with orgies of blotch'd wickedness,
Hopeless the more because so foully block'd
From air and light, those angels of redress,
That with their sweet touch make all human evils less.

And they—the masters of these dwellings sad,
Of hideous vault and crazy lodging-house—
Had than their tenants scarce a heart more glad ;
For things above them did upon them browse,
And crush'd their millions to make one carouse.
The Angel said, “ Yet now I ope to thee
Depths deeper than this city-ground allows,
Yet lower human animalculæ
Than the poor things in vaults which thy sad eye doth see.

“ Men buried in the cellars of the town
Have freedom to the blessed light to run ;
But there are mortals, thousand fathoms down,
Who that last link with nature have undone.”
Then a new sorrow was for me begun :
Mines, mountain-deep, disclosed their toiling race,
Whose very warmth is gain'd not from the sun,
But from Earth's central fires. Not felons base [face.
Were they ; but men whose want compell'd them from day's

I said, “ The savage, who above-ground goes,
Is happier, and hath more of dignity,
Than the poor serf whom Culture's self down throws
Into a pit where his defrauded eye
Forfeits man's glory to behold the sky
From mother Earth : — a man quick buried,
Who walketh lower than his corpse shall lie,
Dust unto dust consign'd ere life be fled,
And spurn'd by every heel that passes o'er his head.

“ Earth on her surface bears a weight of woe,
But heavier in her bosom ! ” Then amazed
I saw what pomp grew up from pangs below.
Where mines yawn'd hideous, Luxury was emblazed
With all her jewels ! Comfortless I gazed
On flowers from curst roots. When my eyes I cast
Towards those who reap'd the crop that wretches raised,
Methought, like breath of unseen curses, past
E'en o'er their proudest joy a foul and cavern'd blast.

To my sad spirit, whose percipient beam
Made cause and consequence but one appear,
The salt that season'd Luxury's meal might seem
To draw its flavour from a human tear :
And I might marvel, when I saw the clear
Bright household fire, it breath'd no deadly smoke
To kill the smiling circle's happy cheer ;
Nor of red mine-blast, and quick ruin spoke ;
Nor sent up mourners' sighs the merry laugh to choke.

“ Ah careless owner of those hidden caves,
Whose dull neglect so swells pain's dread amount,
At least,” I cried, “ thou should'st protect thy slaves
From being struck at once from life's account
By hundreds, when the fire-damp bursts its fount,
And the foul thing they breathe, which thou call'st air,
Is merely death ! Can luxury so blunt
Thy soul to Thought's keen edge that thou dost spare
To know thy own earth-hell ? Go, but for one hour, there,

“ And try what 'tis to breathe ! Wert thou condemn'd
To spend small fractions of thy silken day,
Round by those dismal vaults intensely hemm'd,
Where e'en a candle blueely dies away
Into a corpse-light—would'st thou then delay
To rend the rocks and pierce the upward soil
With shafts, which might some pulse of air convey
To those, whose lungs have been thy ghoul-like spoil,
That thou might'st breathe perfumes, while they for breath did
toil ? ”

The Angel said, "Yon languid lord of pain
Is too far off thy pleading voice to hear,
And God Himself, perchance, might scanty gain
A moment's audience from that sloth-dull'd ear."
Then fell I into musings of strange fear,
Because I saw the many feed the few,
And higher beings have the costlier cheer:
"What if this rule," I thought, "prolong its clue,
And man feed loftier worlds than those his gaze can view?"

"May not unseen and subtle powers of air
Quaff the fine juices of his heart and brain?
Why is that yearning sigh, that sick despair,
That deep soul-sinking, and mysterious pain,
I note in him, if none that loss can gain?"
And higher still its flight my boldness play'd,
Asking, "Doth God His own Creation drain?"
Certès, I heard some mortals unafraid
Say, "All created things God for Himself had made!"

My Teacher said, "Go not beyond thy sight!
One step in the dark betrays thee o'er a steep.
Evil—the giant shadow of God's light—
Perplexes Angels! But one thought may keep
Thee humble . . . We from different stands may leap
To contrary conclusions. Wherefore dream
The Maker smileth while His creatures weep?
Is God, indeed, as happy as men deem,
Or hang not all the cares of all mankind on Him?"

I said, persistent, "Why 'twixt man and man
So gapes this monstrous inequality?"
"Tis inequality presumeth plan,"
Return'd my Guide. "Men's portions, too, may be
In truth more equal than thine eye can see.
Remember what vile things did hang their load
On higher animals! Round Power's hid knee
May cling a serpent. On a king bestow'd,
As on the pike, instead of crown may be a toad.

"Besides, though life seems portion'd ill between
The do-nothings, and the do-everythings,
The unproductive mortal is a screen
To his own uses. From his sloth outsprings
The toil of thousands, in concentric rings,
Sustaining thousands more. Thus life is made
Beautiful with alternate balancings
Of shadow'd sunshine and illumined shade,
And is in that sweet robe, Variety, array'd.


"Would'st thou that miracle, the world, down-press
To one low plain; nor valleys have, nor heights?
Clasp that dull thing, unvaried happiness?
Nay, *could'st* thou? . . . Man but lives by opposites,
And days are days though intervening nights."
"But why so dark the shadows?" ask'd I still:
The Angel murmur'd, "Why so bright the lights?
E'en now 'tis granted me by higher will
To show thee what large good may balance human ill.

“ Rest then, awhile, beholding human joys,
Common to all, which sorrow’s edge abate !
The compensation, and the equipoise
Shall thy past visions soothe and mitigate,
When retrospect renews these hours of hate ;
And something fragrant from thy coming trance
With thy remaining dream itself shall mate,
And linger with thee, as thine eyes advance
To evils which as yet have scarcely met their glance.”

III.

A swoon came over me, a sleep in sleep,
No unkind dew, but with refreshment fraught.
It past! I stood upon a lofty steep
Which scarcely was a mountain, but a thought,
From whose aërial vantage-ground I caught
A wondrous prospect, stretching wide beneath,
Whence old and new were to my vision brought
By penetrative love; not the mere sheath
Of nature, but a joy, a beauty, and warm breath.

Where was the Visible? Lo, in its room,
Th' Invisible was throned! Plains, rocks, and trees,
Transpierced with light, and ever-living bloom,
Were solved into their primal essences.
Almost it was as if my soul could seize
The naked thoughts of God! Bold shadows there—
Nay—things which might man's eye with horror freeze
Wrought but a joyful wonder in the air,
Because delight and dread were twin-like everywhere.



Yet these amazements of material sight
Sank dim before the awful Mind of Man—
A landscape in itself, whose infinite
No eye could grasp; and, if my own did scan
Some portion of its majesty and plan,
How this could be Remembrance now is dumb
To utter! . . . Language is too weak to span
The beauty and the equilibrium,
Which of unequals made one fix'd unvarying sum.

'Twas strange! I saw not what I thought to see,
No great material joy, nor anything
Which dimly from my days of earth to me
Gleam'd back as man's idea of what might fling
A comfort upon days of suffering:
But homely instincts everywhere at work
For some great purpose of replenishing.
Where mischiefs rioted, there too did lurk
Such countercharms as cure, e'en when they seem to irk.

A troop of spirits, small as honey-bees,
Before my sight, a mighty power attain
To baffle blind destruction's energies
By numbers: hour by hour, and grain by grain
Repairing, reproducing, making gain
Of loss; where anything was downward heaved
Rebuilding. When I saw how much of pain
Was so erased, my soul this thought received:
That man was not so curst as he himself believed.

Dials count sunbeams — man each cloud that lowers.
 Thou who complainest of life's stormy ray,
 Say, hast thou number'd thy serener hours?
 God's little kindnesses of every day,
 Which often bless'd thee, e'en in thine own way?
 Thou hast not! Evil makes a mighty noise,
 But Good is silent! Yet 'twere well to weigh
 Remember'd sorrows with forgotten joys:
 O yet reverse thy plan! Restore Life's equipoise!

How man was made, and fashion'd to his pain,
 I saw: how he loved Terror — midnight hag —
 E'en more than Hope, the rough beyond the plain.
 No wreaths like those he snatch'd from off a crag
 Where Danger waved her everlasting flag,
 Signalling Death! Of joy he wearied soon,
 And, for a change, some hideous weight would drag,
 Or sit on pillars in the scorching noon,
 And what he fiercely sought he threw away when won.

So sorrow seem'd man's natural element
 Which he would make, if God bestow'd it not.
 'Twas therefore kind to gratify the bent
 In wiser ways than man himself could plot:
 And, where 'twas Heaven that did the pang allot
 To mortal breasts, there heavenly healing was.
 God's storms had beauty, and made fair the spot
 Of soul, o'er which their wildest rage did pass,
 As tempests hang a gem on every blade of grass.

Then did I see how that presentient shroud
Of grief, which raiseth many a fond complaint
In mortal bosoms, is a friendly cloud.
Storms fall less heavily which men fore-paint.
And the struck spirit utterly would faint,
Hurl'd from full joy. So 'tis a blessèd thing,
Since Grief must come, that warning of restraint
Which bodes a time of fiery suffering,
And, when the anguish comes, hath drawn its deadliest sting.

Wondrous it was to see realities
Reverse the weak pretences feign'd by man ;
What a mere vaunt were sayings of the wise,
Or customary cures of any ban.
How far from sight the springs of action ran
While moralists cried loudly, " There or here !"
How consolations, which into life's van
The Preacher brings, shrank cowering to the rear,
Or were as decent screens to hide how fail'd the tear.

Of Resignation was a talk and rout,
And some rich widow, folded in black veil,
Might realise the word beyond a doubt,
But in the mouths of most it was a tale
Of falsehood, through which anger did assail
God all the more, because it kept so mute.
True hearts relieved themselves with sob and wail,
And, if they ceased with sorrow to dispute,
'Twas that they saw how grief doth bear a noble fruit.

Some caught at bright words floating in the air,
Which e'en to look on seemed mankind to please :
What matter'd it if only words they were ?
Shadows, that comfort, are true substances !
" Millennium " was the shining star of these ;
Nor were " Equality " nor " Brotherhood "
Void of their beauty and their bosom-ease,
Which oft they shed on man's perturbèd blood,
Though cold hearts frown'd to see such meteors still pursued.

Ridicule, much preach'd down, yet play'd a part
Of joyful excellence before my eyes :
Reliever—soother—saving the young heart
From breaking under old solemnities,
And all the pompous folly of the wise.
Lightly she laugh'd Earth's outworn lies away
As Morn the vapour from her kindling skies.
What holy thing could fear her ? Laugh who may
Beauty is beauty still, and God is God alway !

Laugh, laugh, then, Man ! The very brutes can weep,
But Laughter is thy own distinctive sign.
Let owls their state in noonday ivy keep,
To meet the sunbeam, and to laugh be thine !
Then find more pathos in thy mirth divine
Than moaning bigots in their maudlin tears !
The old grotesque of truth is but a line
Away from all that softens and endears,
And still he weeps the best who laughter most reveres.

Life's bettering came—not by addition only—
But by subtraction, too, and transference.
Happiness flew, to visit bosoms lonely,
From crowded riot-rooms, where every sense
Was pamper'd, but the soul grew drearier thence :
And I beheld how, under God's dear grace,
Sorrow might have its sweetness, and perchance
The bed of sickness be a happy place,
And dungeon-cells grow bright with infinite of space.

How many things changed places ! False and True,
Enthronèd Fiends, degraded Seraphim !
Where were the Good—so bright in their own view ?
Sunk in the sooty depths of darkness grim !
The comely virtues of the world looked dim,
And most respectable Society
In shabby garments walk'd, and wretched trim,
While some despised ones were a joy to see
Amidst the soiled throng : they shone so radiantly.

Nothing was what it seems to mortal gaze !
Methought two sets of laws I could behold
Guarding the silent beauty of God's ways :
One—the apparent—harsh, unbending, cold ;
The other—nestling in that churlish fold
From human eye—soft, pliable, and warm :
And 'twas the last which, with true power controll'd
The menace of the first ; and saved from harm
Whatever shrank beneath oppression or alarm.

Oh blessedness ! The tender and the human
Were lordlier than the tyrannous and strong !
The woman sway'd the man ; the child, the woman ;
So to the weakest did the strength belong.
What lowly mercies check'd encroaching wrong !
Not bristling armies ramparted a land,
But arts, and industry, and happy song :
E'en as the rocks, that crumble on the strand,
Check not the billows so as the soft yielding sand.

Much, that might seem mere baseness to the crowd,
Was seen by me with less abhorrent eye, .
Because I lifted up the outer shroud,
And could the inner springs of action spy.
Against Ingratitude how loud the cry,
Which yet in me did no warm echo move,
For I beheld how proud was Charity,
And Gratitude, which is the smile of Love,
To love alone leapt back, nor on bright falsehood throve.

I saw how man, so grudging and unkind
Unto the happy and the prosperous,
Prompt to pull down Success, and Joy to bind
In the rude gripe of fetters villanous,
Could yet be bountiful and piteous
Unto the fall'n ; and delicately know
How best to soothe the sad and querulous :
Friends were not always by misfortune's blow
Chased ; but, full oft, reveal'd in truth's sincerest glow.

Sweet Nature's consolations ever were
Lovely from situation, springing coy
In solitary places — lone and fair —
Greeting the glance with unexpected joy.
Where was true Love? Not where the happy toy
Their hours away; but haply in the breast
Of some abandon'd one, who doth employ
Her every care to soothe a wretch to rest
Whom every other soul doth fly from and detest.

She ask'd not if the object of her love
Were worthy; that she loved she knew alone!
Thoughts of repayment she soar'd far above;
Her soul's reward was to herself unknown.
Though he, the ruffian, made her sob and groan
('T was all his recompense!) she alter'd not!
Ay, he might beat her, trample on her, none
Should ever know it! But to share his lot,
Though it were shame and death, she all things else forgot.

Next came the glorious faculties of man,
Glorious in sorrow, e'en his woe when swelling:
Memory — the tender cloud that round him ran,
Binding his being, from all senses welling,
Ay, by a fragrant flower, of sweet youth telling;
Reflection, with her large transforming might;
Experience, builder of man's conscious dwelling;
Imagination — crown of inner sight,
Which rounds the great Unseen, and is both eye and light.

Science gave mortals drink from purest springs.
There was a joy to know what God had made,
The number, weight, and measure of all things :
And whoso in this path of grandeur stray'd
Show'd by the calm, wherein he was array'd,
Such knowledge kindred to the mind of man ;
“ Nor is this ever lost,” the Angel said,
“ Nor any truth that visits life's small span
Can be less than a part of one eternal plan.”

Oh, what a great sublime fraternity,
I gazed on then—fraternity for good—
Union for knowledge, spreading equably
Throughout the low and toiling multitude !
E'en the poor miner, whom I once had view'd
As Nature's wretch, debased by slavery's mark,
Regenerate by this holy brotherhood
Lit his small lamp of knowledge, in the dark,
Which shot up, far as heaven, a pure aspiring spark.

Man's preservation of all noble things
Struck me. Life's river roll'd away the mire,
But not the gold-grains. If a thought had wings
It mounted ! Not one spark of that great fire,
Call'd Poësy, was suffer'd to expire.
No few fond notes of music—though swept by
Into the past—but haunted Nature's lyre ;
And, long years after they had seem'd to die,
They did themselves again with human hearts ally.

Yes! I had confidence in man's great heart,
 The people's heart, that sacred, sovereign thing;
 The people's thought, which, unarranged by art,
 Was mountain-wild in natural blossoming,
 To which cold social lies no blight could bring:
 And the dumb eloquence of lofty Will,
 Which spoke in thunder, snatch'd the lightning's wing
 To vindicate its want of wordy skill,
 And, with God's justice one, God's wisdom did fulfil.

While thus I swept the surface-shadow off
 The luminous earth, and saw old forms of fear
 Melt into beauty, and their harsh veils doff,
 A gracious doubt came o'er me. Did I err,
 Or was the light for ever lovelier?
 Was it a fancy, or did heaven impress,
 Albeit the hope did faintly in me stir,
 This whisper on my spirit?—"Men progress!"
 The Angel my dim thought thus dimly did assess.

"Is't not a boon—ay, in itself, a boon—
 If every age believe itself the best?
 Thy questioning heart cannot be answer'd soon,
 Because Eternity contains thy quest,
 And thou of life art a poor mortal guest!
 Measure one arc of that tremendous curve
 The system moves in: myriad years must test
 The problem, if into a round it swerve;
 Then how must moral truth elude sight's feeble nerve!

“Of man’s mere dwelling-place the backward ages
Are numberless! What epochs ere the Earth—
Great mystic tortoise—crept through all its stages
Of elements that fought in wasteful mirth,
And, heaving itself up from Ocean’s girth,
Bore man upon its ridgy back! If so
The forms of matter labour’d at their birth,
Shall not man’s moral processes be slow,
And myriad cycles pass ere man from chaos grow?”

“Now is the era of the great fire fountains,
In the soul’s realm, of crashing and of thunder,
Ere of Stability the mighty mountains
Build themselves up, wild Passion’s sea from under,
Into adorèd domes of joy and wonder:
And as, of old, huge reptiles tenanted
The quaking Earth, ere land from wave could sunder,
Now in the mind are monstrous portents bred,
But, in their place, one day the very Gods shall tread.”

Then did the Angel show me how the mass
Of men were to a wealthier nature wrought,
And their old stature how they overpass
By silent-heaped legacies of thought,
Down to their times from their forefathers brought:
And how by mute resistance they attain
To freedom, and old tyrannies have taught
That more they rule when slacker is their rein:
And now is not the time of sameness to complain;

For Earth has now a mighty movement, and
Movement is Life! Old Nations that have slept
For ages, resting in one sullen stand,
To tingling impulses of change have leapt.
All arteries beat: Man flies where once he crept,
And maketh Speed his lightning messenger
By powers to which he hath but newly stepp'd,
Calling his sight—Discovery! Then, too, stir
In him some loftier thoughts than of a conqueror,

Large thoughts of intercourse with all his race,
Not by the sword! Great waters I descried,
And felt their freshness blow into my face:
I saw the harbours where the navies ride
That bear great Commerce over oceans wide.
The quick, salt gale, the green and dashing wave
Sent joy to me in a resistless tide;
As if I knew of old those billows brave,
Which give the free all thoughts of freedom they can crave.

Then Agriculture with her gifts surprised
My thought; and, in her progress, was conceal'd
A midway life 'twixt rude and civilised,
Which true content to many a breast did yield:
'Twas that of some calm labourer of the field
Who bends o'er Mother Earth for daily bread,
And so to her acquaintanceship is seal'd,
It seems but natural to lay his head
At last for evermore on that familiar bed.

The fierce destructions I had gazed upon,
The plundering and devouring principle
Now in my spirit raised a feeble moan,
Because I saw Life was so full a well;
And, as space must restrict the tribes that dwell
On earth, methought removal was a friend;
And, though the individual pang might swell,
The happiness of millions was the end,
To which each thing in turn its thorny way did bend.

And Reproduction pour'd her ceaseless flood:
Where seem'd old races crush'd in conquest's gripe,
They were not lost—but with a nobler blood
Had blent, to form of men a lofty type,
Temper'd alike barbarian stains to wipe
Away by softness of the race refined,
And with the race refined to mix more ripe
And strong humanity: a grafted kind,
That made the parent-stems seem dull and sapless rind.

A mystery was stirring at my heart;
Why, with such thought, man gorgeously inhumes
His dead, though they unto the dust depart.
I saw bees line their living cells with blooms,
Beavers build houses, man alone build tombs!
And, then, "Resurgam" on those tombs was writ,
Though, when man once was hidden in their glooms,
I saw him never with life's spark relit:
Yet from their silken graves the very worms did flit.

“ Tomb-building man, why art thou, then, so fond
To deck thy dead? Why point unto the sky
Thy spiry sepulchres? Lies aught beyond
The grave, that onward thou dost strain thine eye?”
So ask’d my heart; but nothing made reply:
Silence lay on me! Then the still voice stole
Into my bosom. “ Man’s great destiny—
How fashion’d, how achieved— exceeds thy soul;
Thou on the threshold art: canst thou behold the goal?”

Then on my gaze what loveliness was shook
From thee, fond kneeler at some lowly shrine,
Thou child of wonder with the upward look,
Meek Adoration, seeking the divine
Spirit of things in symbol and in sign,
When vision soars not to the truth of love;
God’s mother-heart in virgin types benign,
God’s fostering bounty in the hovering Dove,
God, in the wayside Cross, down-stooping from above.

So to the gleam of my instructed sight
Glad bounties blossom’d out of earthly ills:
And, though the future yet was hid in night,
Hope, like a sunbeam upon cloudy hills
That sheds soft sparkles over tree and rills,
Cheer’d me with hints of beauty far remote,
Hid under shade: and, gently as distils
Night-music on the ear, a low sweet note
Out of Earth’s very sighs around me seem’d to float.


Then I had snatches of a harmony
For ever running deeper than all pain,
A beauty unbeheld but by the eye
Of God, that seeth all its own domain.
Sometimes, methought, the whole earth was a strain
Of music, passion, poesy—a clear
Strong idyl, wherein discords were not vain,
For larger music making wise the ear,
Resolved sublimely far into some deathless sphere.

And wandering sympathies did half unveil
The monstrous hieroglyphic of the earth :
And one great thought of God, nor dim, nor pale,
Went ever through man's unknown regions forth,
Ready to dew the heart that felt its worth ;
And Hope, although in graveclothes she was bound,
Still was reborn—an everlasting birth !
So in this blessedness my pain was drown'd,
And long this happy trance did wrap my soul around.

IV.

FROM the deep trance of unimagined joy
I was aroused by Sorrow's new assault.
Dim were my eyes, as if their own alloy
Of earth were staining heaven's crystalline vault.
'T was in myself I found a cloudy fault
That did its mantle o'er creation throw,
And make my pulses desolately halt
With darkness of a deed done long ago,
Whose form or certain hour I vainly strove to know.

The Angel said, "The shadow over thee
Is Imperfection, which to mortal eyes
Builds a huge shape, call'd Sin, dark mystery,
Which man believes a demon did devise,
And calls his first perfection—Paradise.
But Imperfection was already there,
Or man had never fall'n! Angels, more wise,
Think God makes all, and all God's works are fair,
And that which God permits God also doth prepare.



Moreover, know this shade is but a shade,
Whose huge negation turns to positive
By fraud of light—defect, which must be laid
On all that is not God, or doth not live
Wholly in Him. God's first prerogative,
Perfection, dwelleth not in mortal mind!"

Then did I forth this murmuring question give,
"But might not man be perfect in his kind
As God in His, although to lower grade confined?"

"Then would man never rise," rejoin'd my Guide,
"The perfect in its kind no change doth need.
Beasts, in themselves complete, rest satisfied
With their own instincts, and look down and feed:
But that which doth its imperfection heed
Toils to be perfect; and that toil is thought,
Which we behold not in a stone or weed;
So by its ignorance is the spirit taught,
And from man's craving depths his dignity is wrought.

"Nor to contempt of man be much betray'd,
Nor call him God's too strict antithesis,
Lest haply, heaping scorn upon the made,
You but insult the Maker. While th' abyss
Of the Non-absolute before thee is,
Be reverent! Now my task to sterner dooms
Conducts thee by a winding precipice,
Which more and more the light of heaven entombs:
Of straying human souls behold the grosser glooms!"

While these grave words upon my ear distill'd,
The sins of Earth rose hideous to my view.
Debauch and Sloth, that with their foulness fill'd
The fairest cities ; Greed, that with him drew
Envy and Hate ; and in their retinue
Stealthy Revenge, who crept, and watch'd his time.
All hideous wrongs, all agonies that grew
Up from Earth's seething heat, and Python-slime,
Crime's miserable woes, and—worse—man's cures for crime !

I look'd into a vast unwieldy jail,
And saw the heaps of black abandon'd guilt,
And heard the felon gangs blaspheme and rail.
There, were the young and old together built
Into one rotting pile. He who had spilt
Blood was push'd close against the innocent
Whom Justice had mistook, in her fierce tilt,
For guilty. So the gangrene ever went
Deeper, and unto realms more spreading mischief lent.

And I saw streets in cities civilised
Where life was never safe, where Murder stalk'd
Or in broad day, or when deep night, surprised
By dawn of gaslight, of her rest was balk'd.
The more Refinement softened, more there walk'd
Abroad of evil. Under palaces,
Crowds, seeking pleasure, obscene horror talk'd,
And wretched women strove to flaunt and please
Amidst the ghastly pangs of hunger and disease.

“Thou fearful legacy to better breasts,
Perhaps to wake them to their own disease,
Perhaps to stimulate their slow behests
Of mercy from the slothful lap of ease,
Is there, then, none to scan thy maladies
With the clear eyes of knowledge? None to win
Thee to God’s human image by degrees
Out of distortion of unchosen sin,
And Reformation’s task by happiness begin?”

I was not heard! How should I be? Of ways
To bless mankind men choose the easier,
And one that most redounds to their self-praise.
That all men should reform themselves would tear
Too many weeds up, and to flat despair
Level humanity! And how should, then,
Benevolence unto her task repair,
And fuss and bother in the felon’s den?
’Twas not her interest he should rank with other men!

The Angel said, “Take heart! God is not blind,
Neither God’s eyes in men! Down to the cause
Of evils, ever strives the human mind
Through Folly’s quips, and Reason’s countless flaws,
Till, at the last, conclusions sane it draws.
Goodness is feeble—works enormous woe;
But large Intelligence, that learns by laws,
Shall, in the end, be wise to cure and know :
Thou seest what’s left undone. What hath been done I show.”

Then I beheld a true good gardener
Of plants and souls, who, looking up to heaven,
Saw, by heaven's light, a plan to God most dear,
Whereby e'en Seraphim are led, not driven.
"Trust," "Occupation," were the two words given
Out of God's treasury, which to the bitter
Fountains of crime had power to give sweet leaven;
A gentle secret, to amend men fitter
Than all the quackery drugs, and eloquence in glitter.

So in a garden were the felons set
To till it. Med'cined by man's natural toil
They felt the free air soothe their bosom's fret,
And idly-busy mischiefs in them foil.
Methought, each weed they rooted from the soil
Pluck'd one from out their hearts. I saw rude hands—
Once red with blood, perhaps, or base with spoil—
Round the hurt rose-tree twine soft osier-bands,
Thus rearing some glad flower that in the soul expands.


That joy was caught from me. A cry I flung!
I saw a gloomy thing, a frame of wood,
On which a writhing human body swung
Unto the music of a yelling crowd,
Who shouted, grinn'd, and sent forth laughter loud:
And there were women come to see that sight,
Which seem'd to vilify the eye, and cloud
The soul. I ask'd my heavenly Guide what might
Mean that repugnant scene which shamed the face of light.

The Angel said, " Men hang a murderer
Out of the way, that he no more may break
The social order : if themselves you hear,
They also would a dread example make
Of villains, for Society's dear sake :
Perhaps it is so ! " Answer made I none,
But in my breast this chilling thought would wake,
" Does a new murder blot out murder done,
Or boots it men to see two die instead of one ? "

Moreover, the old creed that warnings warn
Look'd very dim before the kindling East
Of Truth : and I beheld, almost with scorn,
That the black gallows-tree was, at the best,
A social scarecrow that had almost ceased
To fright the birds ! I ask'd the Angel then,
" Why is the Executioner so hiss'd,
Although he does his duty before men ?
Why does he wear a mask in lands that meet my ken ?

" Surely, if he mankind exalt and bless,
There should not be a baseness in his name !
If men him for God's minister confess,
Why not applaud him by the voice of fame —
Give him no mask, but honour's oriflamb ? "

The Angel answer'd, as in thoughtful mood,
" Men's instincts halt not, though their laws are lame !
This hate of hangmen points away from blood
To days when, Crime to cure, Crime shall be understood. "



And now the wonder of my spirit was
Fix'd on the murder of refinèd lands :
A wood—a corpse upon the bloodstain'd grass,
A weeping girl, who o'er it wrings her hands,
A gloomy man, who in the distance stands,
And looks upon his work. Yet was his crime
Writ lightly on Opinion's shifting sands ;
" Kill'd in fair duel"—was the cuckoo chime
That did not comfort her, whose woe was for all time.

" 'Tis we who are the World immaculate !"
Cried the unhung. I stripp'd them of their cloak,
And saw it was a lottery of fate
Who should or should not by the hangman choke.
Then in me hideous certainty awoke,
'Twas not the crimes reveal'd, 'twas the crimes hid,
That made Earth's sorrow ! Light on thousands broke
Who to their moral murders softly slid,
And let their victims bear the shame of deeds they did.

I saw a poor lost girl who wrung my heart—
So young, so beautiful, but O, how worn !
Bright paint upon her cheek bemock'd her smart,
With a hoarse cough her hollow breast was torn :
I look'd back on the same in her life's morn,
And saw her sitting 'midst a happy clan
Of relatives—now scatter'd and forlorn
Through her—and, tracing back that evil's ban,
I saw, 'midst festive crowds, a gay world-honour'd man.

Impulsive I exclaim'd, "O heavenly Guide,
Canst thou bring good out of these blots and scars?"
He gently forth a graver question sigh'd,
"Can the created read God's calendars?
That human guilt man's life so wildly mars
Is God's own secret! Yet thou may'st be taught
To lift the mystery from its weightier bars.
Take then this comfort to thy sterner thought,
Crimes are the sturdy stuff whereof great deeds are wrought!

"No Passion is a necessary ill!
The lust of property that makes the thief
Creates a realm. The murderer's rage to kill
Shows bold and godlike in some hero-chief.
Love's mighty instinct, oft a hideous grief,
How fair it is when gentle bosoms mate,
And home's affections bind in one rich sheaf
The Family—that state within a state—
Heaven's image, too, whose type the Father did create.

"But, as the tree that men call Manchineel,
In its own offshoots doth itself outgrow,
And makes huge shade, through which no sun can steal
To dry the poison-tears it drops below
On soil where only poison-flowers can blow,
So doth each primal passion shoot and spring
Far from its first intent, and rankly throw
Great dropping arms about, that earthward cling,
Take root, then forth again a weaving forest fling.

“ And than the forceful Passions drearier far
Are subtle instincts — native tendencies —
Which in the deeper bosom wage their war,
And from whose ravage Good doth seldom rise :
Their large domain must start unto thine eyes
E'en now !” These words new clear'd my vision's dower,
And I beheld a wondrous realm arise
Where Pride and Vanity and Love of Power
Breath'd in the breath of man, and ruled his every hour.

Then what a heap of beautiful disguises
These Passions took ! When Pride was Proper Pride
She, as a Virtue, won Opinion's prizes ;
And Vanity look'd well, when she could hide
Under maternal Love, who push'd and tried
How she her daughters to fine seats might thrust ;
And oft with sorrow some fair girl I spied
Whom she had wedded to some beast of lust,
Who only had his Wealth to gild the foul disgust.

Vanity's sister, who was Love of Show,
Drest as Appearance, led up dance and feast
With much untiring energy and glow :
Whene'er a neighbour's luxury increased,
So did hers too : if the excitement ceased
She leagued with Fraud, who, from small slips of paper,
Wrought seeming gold, whereby the crowd he fleeced ;
But, if Truth came too near them with her taper,
The scraps caught fire, and all the wealth was turn'd to vapour.

Love of dominion pierced life's fine recesses,
For she was kind Authority, she said !
She gave her small officials subtle presses,
To squeeze down souls that were too largely made :
Servants with masters, wives with husbands play'd
At this poor game, that always ended ill ;
For, e'en where it might seem a thriving trade,
Some strange upstarting of the victim's will
Would shatter in an hour webs wove through years of skill.

Ill-temper had a heart susceptible,
And all the world behaved so wickedly
To her, that, if she made her home a hell,
'T was not her fault, and only what should be.
Scandal was very meek as Charity,
Who thought that not to care about her neighbours
Was deadly sin : but, somehow, always she
Cared only to remark their bad behaviours,
And show'd her tender love by talking at them sabres.

Ambition throve as Public Business,
Which, without him, could not get on, he knew ;
He wore a grand disinterested dress,
And talk'd immensely fine. I saw 't was true
He had infinity of work to do—
But not the Country's—his was to upset
The minister, and all the reigning crew,
Into whose places he and his might get :
This done, of large reform he stopp'd his bullying threat.

In office, out of office ! Different things
I found these were, and mighty changes bore
Upon the mortal into place who springs :
Then would he sudden unsay all he swore,
Take up the wars he thunder'd at before,
And blushing own—Conviction truth attends !
Close at his side, still varying with the hour,
Was Party-Spirit, severing chiefest friends,
Who, cloak'd as Public Zeal, filch'd sundry ribbon-ends.

Sometimes a Virtue strangely was reversed.
Self-Love, who truly was a mighty heart,
Became, in mortal speech, a vice accurst—
Mere selfishness—e'en when her only part
Of joy was healing any human smart :
For some philosophers, who never knew
Impulsive kindness, had the dreary art
To prove that all life's many-tissued clue,
And motive's every spring to selfishness were due.

Amidst this trick'd-up masquerading race
With much ado I found out Avarice,
For now he changed his shirt, and wash'd his face,
Board-waged his servants, did not dine on mice,
And was, at worst, a most respected Vice :
Then, when he died, his melted gold produced
Hospitals, churches, women, wine, and dice,
Legacies noble, joyous, and full-juiced,
Which, with a mighty gush, life's circulation loosed.

“ Deeper, yet deeper,” cried the Angel’s voice ;
“ On to the realm of Inner Feeling press,
Where the vain forms, that sorrow or rejoice,
Transmute themselves to man’s own Consciousness :
The silent land, the lone, the limitless,
Where the Five Senses, with their touch and shape,
Come not, the mortal soul to dispossess
Of her throned Grief. Here Truth shall not escape !
All else, perchance, may be of True on False the rape.

“ But to behold this region nakedly,
Its world-wide woe and universal fear,
Would task too sternly thy unpractised eye,
And strength of searchful labour : so this sphere
Shall but reflected to thy view appear,
Where it condensed is, and beautified.
See, then, into the bosom of the Seer,
One of a race who scan what forms but hide
From common souls, that see only life’s upper side.

“ Such are called Poets ; for they do create
Th’ essential out of thousand elements ;
And hope and fear—joy—sorrow—love and hate—
Their eye lays bare, their subtle art presents :
Yet this the common scoffer ne’er prevents
From taunting them as madmen or as fools,
Because they gauge the meanings and intents
Which he can fathom not, and work with tools
That are the very gibe of Wisdom’s owlish schools.”

I look'd. A universe before me lay,
Finer than that imponderable light
Which through Earth's atoms weaves its searching way,
And is to the material world of sight
What thought is to the soul! As this takes flight
Out of Form's realm, so is it unbeheld
By the corporeal eye, and doth requite
Only the spirit that itself hath quell'd,
And to its earthly frame a heavenly burial knell'd.

Not all woe-shaded was the wondrous land:
Youth claim'd the border, and made fair that zone
With Love, and his companionable band
Of Hopes, and high Resolves, and Wishes, prone
To cross the misty sea of the "Unknown"—
That joy, that terror! But, as onward ran
My vision, and the inner realm was shown,
Worlds of reflective agony began
Before me, and I saw the true domain of man.

Then prest on me the million tragedies,
Void of the sceptre, and the purple stole,
Acted in quiet rooms—unseen of eyes.
Chief came the haunting of the human soul,
Knowing her evil, ignorant of her goal,
The pang of sinning 'gainst the Infinite!
And there was one, who did to me unroll
A new strange volume, as, like statue white,
He sat with fixed eye, and gazed into the night.

“Remorse is on him!” said the Angel’s voice:
“On him, the living one, who to the clod
Is link’d, and so forbidden to rejoice,
While measuring, with the spirit’s awful rod,
The void and distance betwixt him and God!
And smallest things make havoc in the eye
Of Conscience—fine, immortal sense, bestow’d
On man alone! If cultured from on high,
It feels a wandering grain like some great agony.

“Oh, the first struggle upward from the brute
Must be an anguish! Can mere man sustain
The alien band that joins but cannot suit
Conscience to Reason—Consciousness to Pain?
The wild, wild horses tearing at the rein
Within one bosom! Death, that Nature screens
From animals, but unto man shows plain,
Who knows what that low, sullen murmur means,
The river’s fall sends up to blast life’s fairest scenes!”

But how escape? Methought all earth—nay, heaven—
Against man’s peace was leagued—the world without,
The world within! Though shown where she was driven,
Strong, hungry Passion at the bait still caught,
Crying, “At least I will not die for nought!”
Temptation everywhere her snares did place;
And, when she to her will the wretch had wrought,
She gave him to Occasion, Fiend of grace,
So ready to oblige, then laugh men in the face!

Oh the first torture of the youthful mind,
That pants and struggles with its new offence,
When Childhood's Eden must be left behind,
And Conscience, with her fiery sword, waves thence
The wanderer away! Oh the fierce sense
Of hopelessness! The fault is done! No keen
Remorse, no holy dew of penitence,
Not God Himself can make it not have been;
Though Angels whisper peace, that thought comes in between.

Ah, little need there was for penance-goads,
Or shirt of hair, which some wore next their skin,
So to make dead the bosom's biting loads!
For one dread thought might agonise within
Fine linen, and the mask of laughter thin,
Which made men think the martyr's soul unwrung;
And he, who fled not from the world's gay din,
Might with remorse more terribly be stung
Than he who plied the scourge forsaken rocks among.

I had a glimpse into a fearful realm
Of baffled passion, where strong Circumstance,
Leagued with the World and Duty, held the helm
Against Desire; while, mazed in Terror's trance,
The soul did on her stormy way advance.
Thou young forsaken wife, were all things known,
Thy breast would seem a battle-field, perchance,
Above Marengo; and thy conquering crown
(For thou didst conquer!) shine Earth's brightest glory down.

Following this strife, swept whirlwinds horrible
 Of faith insulted—sense of scorn and wrong,
 Trust ill-repaid, deception's smarting hell,
 Love's dread betrayals! Then, from this fell throng,
 I singled Jealousy, whose torment strong
 So prest upon her bosom, she could feel
 Its very form, as though it did belong
 To the material world! Aye, rave and kneel, [steel!
 Poor wretch, thou canst not shun those points of quivering

Next was the Artist's pang—that double woe—
 The flight before him of his own great thought,
 And the world's envy of his soul's rich glow:
 While his Ideal in the heavens he sought,
 I saw him sink, with hissing tongues distraught.
 And thou, Celebrity, I watch'd thy pains!
 Unhappy one, whom Defamation taught
 How brainless things may plague the noblest brains,
 Smearing thy sacred walls with slimy slander-stains.

And say that you have genius, 'tis to say
 You cannot have a friend! In its own cloud
 Genius is ever wrapp'd; and on its way
 Speeds like the lightning, in its mystic shroud,
 Which, in the moment that it speaks aloud,
 Is not! Its essence is to move alone!
 But, oh, the thoughts that from the common crowd
 Enfold the chosen in their awful zone,
 'Tis God's best boon to man they live and die unknown.

How dear a price Joy ask'd man's cup to fill !
Bought is the word — yes, every joy was *bought*,
If not with gold, with something dearer still,
Health, honour, peace of mind ! So, over-wrought,
Some over-slept their lives, some raved them out
In quietless fire : and of all these not one,
If Heaven had offer'd, had a heart so stout
He would re-tread the drear way he had gone,
Nor rather cry, " Thank God, so much of it is done ! "


There was a mortal, shown me in the mirror
That lay before me, who had been from birth
A sorrowful one, and laden with strange terror :
He could not mould himself to mortal mirth
Because it jarr'd so with all human dearth ;
So, day and night, he sat in solitude
Tormenting the enigma of the Earth,
Which darker seem'd the longer he did brood,
Yet to rise up and laugh he found too bold a mood.

Then came the sorrow of the piercing sight,
That sees too deep, that strips off the fair face
Of varnish'd beauty that appears so bright.
Ah wretched man ! — wretched and, haply, base
Who thinks but evil of the human race,
So deepest slander on himself doth call ;
Forced in his breast man's loathèd type to trace,
The envy, and the falsehood, and the gall,
And so from depth to depth for ever sink and fall.

Far happier was the foolish one of Earth,
Who in all things, as they appear'd, believed ;
The heavenly-wise, who to the world made mirth,
Never deceiving—ever the deceived !
The fiftieth time he trusted, and was grieved
By trust betray'd, and yet could trust again ;
Nor one worse thought of human nature weaved :
His poor mistakes, and clearings-up with pain
Were worth all knowledge-stores of Worldly-Wisdom's brain.

Pale Expectation, in that orb of ill,
Dwelt ; who on sick delay was nurst and fed,
Murmuring, “ I want Despair, for that may kill ! ”
And Disappointment, who for years had said
“ I will not hope ! ” but, when her hope was dead,
Knew she had hoped ! Then partings from the loved
Their bitterness upon my bosom shed :
Methought Life's pathway was so harshly grooved,
All that the heart held dear it ruin'd or removed.


And there were souls on whom still hung a weight
Of coming evil ; who could fill the blank
Of the great Future with all forms of Fate,
And hear from far the muster and the clank
Of Sorrow's dread battalions, rank by rank,
Trampling the beauty of the silent air !
For Silence was a foe, whose hideous flank
They could not turn. Pain they could lightly bear,
But Joy had omens dark, whose face they might not dare.



I saw a man who of these tortures wide
Had known great part, perhaps the universe!
Upon his brow was written—"Suicide!"
Dread was his slumber! Bnt, whate'er the curse
Of phantom-sleep, his waking hour was worse.
Woe's finer essences, eluding words,
He drank. Ah me, what pains and tortures fierce
Must have been his; what grief in heaps and hoards
Of Life's great instinct so to rend the mighty chords!

This portion of my dream takes now its flight.
But think not I the millionth part have told
Of human agonies that met my sight,
Or, beyond vision, into distance roll'd;
From torn Prometheus and Jocasta old,
Down to the latest gasp of weary men;
What poets sing, or chroniclers unfold,
What is, what hath been, and shall be again,
Th' eternal Hell, whose smoke reeks up from Earth's foul den.

These things I saw with gaze discomfited,
And all the mitigation I could glean
Was—that the poet's breast, in which I read,
Glass'd the great horror in its own serene,
And well'd out beauty that made deserts green:
And there was hope within the poet's mind
That leapt to me: for sometimes he, I ween,
Dreamt how through sorrow golden Plan might wind,
And why this awful world so sternly is design'd.



Then dimly I beheld (oh, joy it was,
E'en that pale glimpse into the hidden scroll
Of God's high purposes!) before me pass
Of man's fierce strife the meaning and the goal ;
First steps to freedom, lessons of control,
Pain the great Teacher, noble discontents —
By these to build an individual soul
Out of Life's weak unconscious elements,
All working to one end through wide and various bents.

Here, I saw tottering children, tutor'd by
Experiment of pain ; there, a long line
Of fervent youths, whom wilful passions try,
And give them to God's Angel, Discipline.
Then, Self-Denial beam'd a smile divine
On shapes heroic, fashion'd like to men :
More onward was the glory and the shine
Of a bright martyr-army, mounting, then,
To Heaven, where clouds of light received them from my
ken.

V.

“WHERE has Death hid himself? The cloudless air
Cannot conceal him: yon blue waters heave
Too joyously his dusky bark to bear!
Were he in yonder trees, he would bereave
Their full green tresses! Did the young flowers weave
A shroud for him, they would not look so bright
And summer-warm! Almost I could believe
My task of tears were melted from my sight,
And all Creation lay in God’s dear smile of light.”

“Yes!” said the Angel, quick my thoughts to read,
“Now, dost thou God complacently survey
In thy own calm! But thou shalt ill succeed
To take God’s beauty from a summer-day
Which straight a summer-cloud may snatch away!
When pain disturbs thee, the old mystery
Back on thy heart will fall, and heavily slay
Thy infant faith. Therefore ’tis best to be
Strong to behold the worst that comes by God’s decree.

“ ‘I create evil!’ hath the Great One said :
But certain dooms of life are more direct
From Him, and less immingled with the braid
Of man’s dark weaving, with whose meshes fleck’d
The native work is harder to detect.
Disease, and Storm, and Fate are a strong woof
Of life, nor dim, nor doubtful to dissect :
God’s Woes they are ; and, if they should rebuff
Thy soul, remember this—Foundation-stones are rough !”

With that I enter’d on a circle new
Of deeper darkness, where Disease and Pain,
And thousand kinds of death, that with them drew
Of conscious flesh the tremble and the strain,
Earthward fell down from heaven as thick as rain ;
So that it seem’d mankind but mock’d the gods
When they invented torture, weak and vain
In its malignity to turn the odds
Against the fiery stroke of the celestial rods :

For they above knew how and when to touch
The quivering nerves, and lengthen with slow skill
Anguish, that robb’d all inner balms, when such
Had propp’d the beauty of the martyr’s will :
Nor was there wanting, this dark cup to fill,
God’s strange revenge on sins of ages back
By hoarded and hereditary ill—
The father’s fault which did the child attack,
Chasing its guiltless prey through long ancestral track.

Yet I could see Mankind themselves were cause
Of half these plagues; because they went astray
So far and wildly from health's frugal laws:
But, even thus, the pangs and disarray
Which warn'd them back to Nature's happy way
Were means to make the social fabric rise.
I saw great thoughts beneath warm luxury's ray
Expand; and man's disorders make him wise
With wealth of many a thought unknown to paradise.

Then I beheld maim'd Nature's worse arrears;
Of sense privation, and of limb defect;
Eyes, shut to light — not closed, alas, to tears! —
Man's godlike speech at soundless portal wreck'd.
"Look nearer," said the Angel, "this neglect
Of outer workmanship may inly hide
Some deep perfection, in whose fair respect
Thy mournful vision may be glorified!"
With that, a new sweet world of wonder I espied.

I saw the Idiot form a nucleus
Of love, and dear domestic charities;
Who tended him grew kind and generous,
And paid themselves with heavenly usuries:
I saw the Blind, content with other's eyes,
Pity the pitying world, whose sight perchance
Was only rich in human agonies;
If knowledge barr'd one inlet from their glance,
Temptation, too, shut out made blest that ignorance.

Nor fail'd I with a tender eye to mark
Houses for Sorrow built by Happiness;
To me they seem'd, amidst the city dark,
Than some divine Aurora scarcely less:
The feet that pass them pause as if to bless!
'T was they, and not the rich abodes of Kings
Were the true palaces; and, 'midst the press
Of anguish, woman's tender ministrings
There oft shed beauty more than queenly lustre flings.

But Madness was less happy! Did she crave
Motion? Strait-waistcoats check'd her wild appeals!
If then indignantly she dared to rave,
Some wretch upon her head a shower-bath deals.
" Ah, meddle not with those tremendous wheels,
Thou ignorant! A harsh touch spoils a watch!
And clumsy hands much more what Madness feels
Derange, and hope of cure away must snatch;
And the mysterious spring once broke thou canst not match."

Yet Madness her own realm of reason had,
Where her disorder did due order find,
Sometimes so keen, it might be that the mad
Were oft the least insane of human-kind.
One frequent form of the distracted mind
Was to behold life's wondrous ridicule,
The puppets jerk'd by wires—themselves so blind—
The strut and banter of the pompous fool,
And the mad stir for power when all so short its rule!

Then I was shown the realm of accident,
Which spreadeth everywhere by sea and land ;
Strange hazards, out of God's great storehouse sent,
(If those be hazards which are subtly plann'd)
Which overtake men as they idly stand
'Neath their own roof-tree. Oh, what woe and wail,
What rend of hair, what wringing of the hand
In this part of my dream, did me assail,
Till through the shocks of sight my faith began to quail.

Here, in my view, a pleasure-bark sinks down,
By sudden gust, before a Father's eyes,
Who, safe on land, beholds his children drown —
His life's whole freightage ! There, my glance descries
A Father's corpse, mangled in piteous wise,
Home to his wife and babies brought at noon,
Whom he, at morn, had left in happy guise
Of manhood and gay health. Thus, late and soon,
Disaster pitch'd her darts at all beneath the moon.

Yet were survivors lightly comforted,
And that, which oft more sadness in me wrought
E'en that fate's vengeful arrow when it sped,
Was — to behold the dead so soon forgot !
Few, few were shrined in a faithful thought !
And they, who should have found a living tomb
In a fond bosom, there to dust were brought
Sooner than in the sepulchre's chill gloom,
And many a worthless love sprang rankly in their room.

Then ocean-horrors crowded on my vision :
A burning ship ! I saw that agony !
And sudden gulfings down, and dark collision
Of barks, when midnight had put out the sky :
And wrecks on surf-bound coasts, where toilfully
The crew's pale remnant wander'd many a rood,
Till God in them gave place to Famine's eye,
And on each other's faces did they brood,
Pondering which first should be the weak survivor's food.

Yet on these dooms with wretchedness o'ercast
Oft one fair deed a heaven of beauty shed :
I saw a ship that waves were 'whelming fast ;
The boats were out, and crowded with quick dread :
" Go you before me ! " a young sailor said
To a young Mother trembling at his side ;
" You have a babe—mine is a single head ! "
He saved that babe and mother ! Then the wide
Ocean engulf'd the ship, and in the waves he died.

" O Man," I cried, " Creation's paradox !
How reconcile thy struggling chaos—how
Fathom the depths thy endless bosom locks
In its small circuit ? Basely selfish now
As are the brutes ; then with clear earnest brow
Scaling great heights of generosity ;
Thou fiend—thou god—why poorly rovest thou
Beyond thyself in search of mystery ?
What riddle can be worth, or wondrous after thee ? "

Upon my Spirit's music bursting quick
A howling chorus broke discordant in.
"We are God's Woes!" cried voices loud and thick,
"Yea, God's sore Judgments upon mortal sin!"
But, when I look'd to spy the origin
Of all this clamour, to discovery came
Only three hags, one ragged shroud within:
To read them right not long perplex'd my aim,
For each a banner held whereon was writ her name.

And One was War, and One was Pestilence,
And One did Famine on her standard show:
I turn'd on them a beam of evidence,
And saw them to a fainter aspect grow,
And heard their voices sink in whispers low;
While they, before my guiding Angel's nod,
Confest they did but lying words out-throw,
And had small claim to rank with Woes of God,
But were by man made up—half demon, and half clod.

That this was truth I in my soul perceived;
For, looking keenly, I beheld the dire
And hideous Triad secretly upheaved
By horrid alchemy out of a fire,
Which great ones of the Earth did never tire
To feed, and blow with human groans and sighs:
Ambition puff'd to raise the furnace higher;
And Greed and Selfishness, his dear allies,
Toil'd to send up the smoke that hid their hot emprise.

War got her being most from kingly hearts,
Which with the people's ne'er together beat ;
Where from neglect of rulers the land smarts,
Red Pestilence derives her grossest heat
From undrain'd alley, and from crowded street :
And how is ghastly Famine's pest begun ?
What men starve most when there is least to eat ?
Not thou, degenerate Luxury's bloated son,
Nor thou, who hoard'st the grain which had the ill undone !

So from these vamp'd-up Woes of God I turn,
Disgusted with their foul hypocrisies,
And ask what other ills vex Earth's sojourn
That do in very truth from God arise.
Then Woes of Clime I saw ; — hot, cruel skies,
Dark groves, where breezes shut their healthy fan,
Where serpents triumph, but the mortal dies ;
Or frozen wastes which dwindle to a span,
By half-year nights and days, the frame and soul of man.

Woe to the traveller who wanders there,
Or in the torrid or the frozen tract,
Condemn'd extremes of parching thirst to bear,
Or by cold hunger shrivel and contract !
Perhaps alone ! — and by reflection rack'd
That never shall he see man's face again !
Yet was the wanderer's oft a godlike act ;
For, e'en in death, how strong his triumph, when
He swell'd his country's wealth, and oped the earth to men !

Still by me pass'd the ministers of doom,
Whose very names men utter with pale lip,
Whirl of the desert-sand, and red Simoon,
And Hurricane with his all-levelling whip :
Avalanche; and fall of mountains, that down-slip
On villages that slumber at their feet,
Dreaming of safety ! Then, whate'er doth nip
The hopes of Nature ; locust-clouds that meet
Gardens, but leave them deserts ; hail, and rainless heat.

Then Earthquake gulf'd her thousands at one shock ;
Nor came alone ; for, where she rent the ground,
Fierce Conflagration did her stores unlock,
And greedy, flooding Ocean burst her bound.
Volcano then threw up her flaming mound,
That whelms whole crowds at some rejoicing time ;
And Storm rush'd by, with cold, keen lightning crown'd,
Which does not always blast the breath of crime,
But strikes the innocent down in their exulting prime.

When I saw myriads thus, by God's decree,
From warm existence into nothing crush'd,
My trust was shook : " If this God's love can be,
What then His hatred ? " was a thought that rush'd
Into my breast, nor hasten'd to be hush'd.
The Angel read me with his heavenly eyes,
And thus his accents on the silence gush'd,
" Doubt all, or nothing ! These catastrophes
Scarce add one deeper shade to Life's dark mysteries.

“The Earthquake shocks thee ; Pestilence, that mows
Its millions down, into thy soul doth rot
As a hid cankering thought that grimly shows
God is not Mercy ! Fool, hast thou forgot
A life goes out each moment—that the lot
Of man is Pain ? Why does one little heap
Of brief distress, just gather’d in one spot,
Afflict thee with an agony so deep ?
Better for Earth’s whole groan thy partial pity keep.

“Better expend upon Misgovernment
Of despots, and their miserable rule,
The peevish rancour of thy discontent,
Than thus about these motes of anguish pule !
Earthquake and Pestilence may be a school
Of moral grandeur ; but, when tyrants revel,
Men wither ! Let thy feverish bosom cool
Down to this thought : Pain is a transient evil—
Pain may an Angel be : Misrule’s a lasting Devil.

“The Boroméan walk’d amid the Pest,
A radiant figure on a sullen ground :
That image is a beauty to the breast !
But look at Italy, now torture-bound
By a worse plague than sickness—Power miscrown’d
In room of Freedom ! And no form of light
Here seen to glimmer in the dismal round
Where harsh Restriction makes perpetual night,
And Ignorance by law is film’d upon the sight.

“ Ah sad ! The Mother, trembling for her son,
Lest out of legal apathy he start,
And, seeing how his country is undone,
Raise but a finger that might soothe the smart,
Leads him herself, by holy-wicked art,
To joys enervate, that may be a cup
Of Lethe to him, and unman his heart !
All low delights he knows from childhood up,
So doth he day by day the softening poison sup !

“ Yet 'tis indeed a thing impossible
So to subdue the glory in the soul,
As down to brutehood man's great thoughts to quell.
So, haply, higher than a worm or mole
Our young Italian soars ! What then ? His dole
Is not the beauty of a patriot's name,
But “ Felon ” writ upon a dirty scroll :
And then the prison must his ardour tame,
Or the death-shot put out his very shreds of fame.”

By such a passage did I wind unto
Man's woes on man, which make God's terrors naught.
First glared the Kingly Curse upon my view,
Building such walls as living whispers caught,
And forging those worst chains—the chains of thought.
That bitter mockery, the grace of Kings,
I sigh'd at then, though Adulation taught
That royal dispensations have no stings,
And gifts that Monarchs give are mercy's choicest things.

If states they did not swallow up alive,
'Twas "moderation." Should their prisoners be
"Not too ill-treated," all mankind might give
A cheer for their enormous clemency!
Yet might small countries, cribb'd of liberty,
With some slight grudge their gratitude alloy
Towards rulers; and spared men deem piously
To be watch'd ever is no state of joy,
And air that teems with ears some comfort may destroy.

Does he, the worker in the mercury-mine,
Whose veins run poison with his death-like toil,
Doom'd for his love of freedom there to pine,
Think God's Anointed stream with holy oil?
Or he, the exile, who a tyrant's spoil
Denounced, who only craved for his share
Of grace, a grave within his native soil,
Yet was denied it—does he load the air
With praise, as him from shore the reckless billows bear?

And faster—faster—after brief relax,
Were Freedom's fetters bound and padlock'd on!
Monarchs could watch their hour for fresh attacks:
If Liberty some little prize had won,
They snatch'd it from her, and made that their own,
Which had cost honest blood and holy tears!
So, by degrees, was Earth's large promise gone,
And what remain'd was—tyranny and fears,
And the first kept the last for ever in arrears!

Yet so the human heart was made—so twined—
It could not live an isolated thing:
It must have aspirations for its kind,
Its country; and for men's just rights take wing
Into the forward, and to Freedom cling;
Because the light, the air, the wave are free,
And, make them otherwise, disease they bring
Instead of health: e'en so the mind must be
To Liberty attuned, or die out loathsomely.

Woe to the people, that are so enslaved
By chains so gilded, that they care no more
To aid the Cause for which their fathers braved
The frown of tyrants and the battle's roar!
Woe to the slaves, who, if they swill and snore,
Rot on contented! But a triple woe
Unto the Tyrant, who is thronèd o'er
This vacuum of all honour! One light blow
Shall hurl him down the depths himself had mined below.

I saw a country of her freedom proud,
And she was Liberty's great Ark, she said;
And fair she was, though wrapp'd in ocean-cloud,
For from her mists peep'd sunshine and green glade;
And like a garden was her land array'd
For trimness. Yet the hedgerow's wavy line
With pretty show of hurtless freedom play'd
About the fields, as if it had design
To say, "Respected are the rights of thine and mine!"

The Angel said, "The land indeed is fair,
But has some blots upon its orbèd light
That thy reluctant eye might gladly spare
Out of the grasp of its admiring sight."
As spoke my Guide, my vision's alter'd plight
Was forced, for grief, its infant joy to barter:
I saw the country of my dear delight,
Though Freedom's prize had cost her many a martyr,
For wealth, and titled name, abandon half her charter.

And much alloy there was in her good gold:
Some catchword could lead thousands! 'T was enough,
If one the thread of her esteem would hold,
To talk of "Earnestness" and such-like stuff!
"The Constitution" sounded big and bluff,
But in the real deed this only meant
Two great State-servants, Jobbery and Puff,
Who to their work in crablike manner went,
And evermore crawl'd back to advance the government.

It was an arithmetical progression,
Where business hours by hands were multiplied:
The more the hands, the less they took possession
Of the stern work, that should have been their bride.
What one stout brain in one hour could decide,
Fifty took fifty months to maul and vex.
Why should the matter have been simplified?
Mismanagement, who loveth wheels complex,
Had nephews, whom she might to every wheel annex.

This fair free realm had, too, an ugly trick
Of seeming to grant freedom in large store,
Yet fettering it by methods politick.
“Noise does not kill—so let the masses roar,”
She thought: so, when a grievance bubbled o’er,
She bid it in loud words evaporate—
Meetings that end in meetings, nothing more!
For these might keep the boiler of the State
Unsprung, though nigh to burst beneath high-pressure’s weight.

Another blot! Magnates who boast they can
Do as they will with their own; though verily
“Their own” may mean the body and soul of man!
“Vote as we vote, our precious tenantry,
Or you shall be ejected from the sty
You call your home!”—that was their tender note!
The filthy huts where these same tenants lie
Were not exactly homes on which men doat;
Yet tyranny from want wrench’d out the lying vote.

Against these ills an engine called the Press
Was working every moment, day and night;
Enormous power of woe and happiness,
Which clothes the majesty of thought with might
Enduring! Where this power was free, the light
Was largest; which with tyrants did not suit;
So they enthrall’d it, more the crowd to blight:
But whether, after all, the crowd was brute,
Or the crowd’s rulers, might be food for keen dispute.

Then Cruelty I saw, a spectre thin,
Dead body haunted by a demon-soul,
The lowest Vice that hid in human skin,
For to herself she was both path and goal.
To cause the pain of others was the whole
Of her lean joy. No sum of torturing
Was much for her—no mite too mean a dole;
Whether it was a blood-enamour'd King
Brought tribute, or a boy with mouse upon a string.

I mark'd her chieftest darlings of old time
Reveal'd to me in vision! Here did sit
A great Queen, who forgot the clock's dull chime
Over a book, in which she drew and writ
Tortures for any thinking scoundrel fit.
"Bring me the wine-cup!" said an Emperor, then,
As, somewhat tired, his sport he did remit
Of cutting off the heads of troublesome men;
Then up he rose refresh'd, and to his work again.

Much that my glance mistook for cruelty,
Or other forms of domination's freak,
The Angel deeper did interpret me
By a new impulse I had yet to seek.
"Yes," said my Teacher, "many a curse oblique
Comes from feudality 'twixt race and race—
The War of Classes—which with pain doth streak
Life from the very summit to the base."
The Angel taught me then to know that mischief's face.

The Rich — the Poor ! How terrible the chasms
In those few words ! What tortures that condense
Lives in their crushing grasp ! What earthquake spasms
Of hatred, struggling up from the hid sense
Of undivulged reciprocal offence
Amass'd through time ! Could these abysses be
Bridged over ? Ah, I saw feuds too intense
Between th' extremes of that great scale, Degree,
Ever to melt and blend in one fond harmony !

Misapprehension sever'd them — that worst
Of severings ! Dimly did the poor man's brain
Conceive of mortals by abundance nurst,
Or debit them with habit's heavy chain,
Or of the good, they wrought him, knowledge gain :
He saw not how vex'd Nature's wrath requires
The lofty classes privileged to pain,
Whom dreadful Leisure with her touch invites
To melancholy days, and restless tossing nights.

On their side did the rich compute but ill
The envy, and the craving, and the dream
Of him below, who long'd to push up-hill,
And share the pomp that mock'd him with far gleam :
Wealth was too careless of his thoughts to deem ;
And, though the European found it meet
To laugh at Caste, when India was the theme,
Yet who would touch the Pariahs of the street,
Or condescend to ask where they did sleep or eat ?

That was a dark spot where the rich did flash
Their insolent joy upon the starving poor,
Where carriages rush'd by, their mud to splash
On crouching wretches huddling at a door !
And, oh, how little did Wealth know the sore
Of workless workmen ; or what words of hate
Were those which told the starving, o'er and o'er,
That Poverty was a most blessed state
Beloved by God ; and they must be content, and wait!

Alas, poor Gold, I heard thee heap'd with wrong
Which was not thine, but man's own selfish bent !
Why art thou so abused in prose and song ?
Is it thy fault that thou dost represent
Comfort, joy, power ? O metal innocent,
Gay, glittering blind ! a shell, a bit of glass,
Would just as fondly mask life's true intent !
And all the good thou dost men overpass,
Yet life holds fast through thee, thou cement of the mass !

“ Professional or not ? ” now took the field ;
High-bred and low-bred, gentleman and lout,
Idler and artist. As the hubbub swell'd
'Twas hard to tell what it was all about.
Here stood a Mother on her reason, stout ;
“ What ! you, my daughter ! marry that vile scamp,
Who gains his bread by daubing ? ” With a pout
The girl was mute. But, when Day hid his lamp,
She with her artist-love did laughingly decamp.

Next came the wars between the young and old ;
Young love, young hope, young generosity,
Young freedom, on to noble progress roll'd ;
Old fear, old hate, old moveless tyranny !
Youth, that for ever pined for sympathy,
Age, that had none, and had forgotten quite
That any throbbings of the heart could be ;
Youth, who saw heaven in ecstasy and light,
Age, that saw God Himself as a great dreary blight.

Last, did the Strife of Classes to me show
How tiger-like was its capricious mood :
In opposites not always seen to glow
It swell'd in similars, as if its flood
Raged hottest in the most related blood.
Peasants on monarchs wrote no diatribes,
Princes to cobblers condescending bow'd ;
But, when men trod upon each other's kibes,
Then burst their grudges out in scorn and mutual gibes.

And all prest forward ; all had some behind.
The Master with th' Apprentice no more sat
To dinner than the Marquis with the Hind —
Nay less ! My lord could nothing lose by that !
Your tradesman was the true aristocrat !
Who was the greatest ? Why, not always God,
But some small beadle with three-corner'd hat,
Who saw not earth, and scarcely thought it odd
To say, " Bow not to me ! I'm human ! Only nod ! "

As rose Deceit, methought of shades the worst
Was but penumbra to her huge eclipse ;
Darker in this—she Prudence was, at first,
Chaste, heavenly guardian of incautious lips
Against intrusive Folly, who uprips
The choicest things ; so in an innocent guile
God e'en the spirit of an infant dips :
But misused blessings turn to curses vile,
And this great daughter of God her birthright did defile.

For, with man's being woven, at all hours
She took all forms, and, canker-like, did gnaw
Into the very heart of social powers,
In whose bright place she left some hideous flaw,
Lies of state-policy and lies of law, [eye ;
Where should have been Love's bond and Truth's clear
But e'en these mighty mischiefs scarce could draw
A glance from me, so soon as I did spy
The one great lie of all—the Education lie !

“ Go, Youth, and sin thy fill, so long as they,
Thy masters, do not know it ! Only save
The decencies, talk glibly, crouch, obey,
Then take the freedom that befits a slave !
Thy secret Saturnalia wherefore waive ?
Dost thou not know thy teachers, too, are nought ?
And all they cry is still ‘ Behave—behave !’
And all they think is hollowness of thought,
And they but toil to teach : no matter what is taught !”

So whisper'd old Hypocrisy to Youth,
Who else was springing on his joyous road
Full of bright honour, full of flaming truth;
But, when he saw Dissimulation mow'd
Good harvests, and Sincerity bestow'd
Poor lean rewards, he thought it best to bind
Upon his visage, lest his thoughts explode,
That mask which crushes from the human mind
Into a grinning blank the features God design'd.

So Life was one great Falsehood! Husbands kiss'd
Lips that they curst for faithless; hands did lace
Themselves together, that in Hatred's list
Long'd to encounter. In convivial place
Neighbour met neighbour with a gay grimace,
Lest in each other's aching hearts they read;
And (shade of shade!) men hugg'd their fictions base,
Knowing they were fictions—though, in very deed,
To think themselves sincere they task'd their utmost heed.

This brought me to a region call'd "the World,"
As if there were no other! A deep play
Of laws and duties in itself was furl'd,
And polity immense. This problem lay
There on men's thoughts—as weighty in its way
As life's enigma, when high souls it racks—
How to make others to them duly pay,
As wits or buts, Amusement's weary tax,
Yet keep their kingdom clear from Truth's profane attacks.

A true thought fell amongst them like a bomb,
And made them start, which was than yawning worse !
So laws they made, that all by square and rhomb
Should form their careful words on pain of curse.
'Tis true this turn'd a feast-room to a hearse ;
But what of that ? The World select could vow
'Twas still the World ! And into it to pierce,
Or e'en to peep, sideways, or anyhow,
Was for the sons of clay sufficient bliss, I trow.


The chief amusement there was levelling :
The many must be cut to match the few.
If of that atom-world some favour'd king
Had his left leg the shorter of the two,
Why, all must limp or wear a high-heel'd shoe :
And, as with body, so it was with mind,
Which had its crutch, or pad, or bandage new,
According as the high superior kind,
In their small mental selves, were halt, or crook'd, or blind.

'Twas a good method to keep all in love
And charity, not only with each other,
But with themselves—for none could boast above
His comrade ; so none had to cloak and smother
A bitter feeling 'gainst his friend and brother :
Now, in this point of view, this realm did seem
So quiet amid life's distracted pother,
Indifference roll'd there with so smooth a stream,
Politeness so prevail'd, my soul might almost teem

With admiration for this calm domain :
But 'twas a cheating region of intrigues,
Where soon I saw the maxim that did reign
Was, " Keep your heart and face a thousand leagues
One from the other !" So the sick fatigues,
And sins that caused them were so crusted o'er,
Scarce were they found by sight that lowest digs
To pierce the mine of this ungolden ore :
Yet every hateful vice came there my view before.

Certès, the saddest sight by Angel seen
Was the tired breast of some old debauchee,
Who, worn yet wicked, gloats on what has been :
Such a one I beheld, who to the lee
Had drain'd life's wine. No joy enjoyèd he :
Nature could charm him not, though flowers and sky
Delighted thousands ! Still he strove to be
Alive to pleasures of his filthy sty,
And yet there was no hour he did not wish to die.

Strange ! Half the trouble the world's votaries took
For evil might their dearest good have wrought,
And peace that tyrant Time had never shook ;
And I might marvel, since they ever sought
Some novelty on earth, why they did not
For a new pleasure try benevolence !
Self-sacrificed they were—great God ! to what ?
Not to some duty, or joy's nobler sense,
But to some curse of life that chased all comfort thence.



This treadmill was the hell of better souls :
By such amusement they were not amused,
But made to moulder like moth-eaten scrolls
That, from the wholesome air away reclused,
Are in their fair-writ characters confused,
And blurr'd from meaning. Yet, the livelong while,
Knowing their state, wretched and self-accused,
They toiled on to act a feeble smile,
Lest they provoke the tongues that slander and revile.

'Twas now I had a dreary view of life.
Great souls wore sorrow as a coronet ;
God's Woes had grandeur ; but the paltry strife
Of wormy things that now my vision met,
The wretched motives of the ruling set,
Crimes done without that pleasure, which might pass
As their excuse, wrought unredeem'd regret !
Worse than the agony the meanness was,
And here on Life was writ one only word — " Alas ! "

VI.

I droop'd discouraged. But the Angel said,
"Advance, and faint not! Soon shalt thou be rid
Of further toil! Haply, when thou dost tread
The dizzy summit of the pyramid,
Day breaks on the other side! Yet I must bid
Abhorrent Earth yield up her last worst throe,
The soul betray her agony most hid,
Ere thine eye find its rest. That thou may'st know
The limit of all pain, behold Religion's Woe—

"The King of Woes!—the illimitable curse
Of spirit and of matter!" With that word
A long low sigh ran through the universe,
And all the pulses of all life were stirr'd
With some slow agony of hope deferr'd.
Then in the air I felt myself take flight,
As if the pinions of a monarch bird
Swept me through space. A blank opprest my sight,
And ages lay on thought ere I regain'd the light.

At length I reach'd a cloud of orbèd gleam,
And on its surface rested, as on board
Some deck aërial, such as men might deem
A Comet (ship of ether!) might afford,
When lingering near some planetary lord
That anchors it by strong attraction's chain.
Nothing I saw, save many a nebulous chord,
That eased of my great ship the swell and strain,
Until a new strange light was seal'd upon my brain.

This ray'd out from a mirror held to me,
Large as a World, with star-beams all a-glow.
"Read thou in this man's mournful history
That left the Earth four thousand years ago,"
Said my dear Guide, whom near me still I know ;
"As back we wend to man's small space-girt isle,
Religion's sorrow shall progressive grow
Upon thy gaze!" The doom-book, all this while
Clearing, did now on me its hateful knowledge pile.

Religion's birth was from the Terrible !
Man felt the tempest, saw the wind-swung trees,
And, as dread Nature on his sense did swell,
Turned her dark powers to gloomy Deities.
Then cruel rites must cruel gods appease :
And there were strong bad men the weak who led,
Adroit to teach the million how to please
By dreadful offerings the god-demons dread,
* For of the upper powers they knew the mind, they said.

So the first Priest arose, by sterner soul
And lust of power, above the cowering throng.
Dark knowledge, too, was his ! He read the scroll
Of heaven ; and, when the queenly moon was bow'd
By monster shade, call'd on his gods aloud :
He had monopoly of mysteries,
Which he enveloped in a thunder-cloud.
Propitiation then, and Sacrifice
Were words that rose to deeds midst heap'd agonies.

Behold yon temple, glittering in the sun,
High on a mound, a temple and a tomb !
There must a dreadful tragedy be done :
The gods want victims ! Up the steep they come,
Fatten'd and deck'd with garlands, to their doom !
Then the fierce Priest, skill'd in his cruel art,
Swells to the dull beat of the snake-skin drum ;
Drowns the dread outcry of the murderous smart,
And from the doom'd one tears the palpitating heart.

But, in the brighter regions of the Earth,
Where Daylight blossoms, and to fade is loth,
Where the great cycle of decay and birth
So quickly turns, it maketh one of both,
And Death comes never, only changeful growth,
Beauty sprang up from ocean, air, and sod ;
So Death was felt to be but half the truth,
And, twin with Him of the destroying rod,
Was the Preserver shrined : Men own'd the Saviour God.

Born of th' Idea, He in flesh was born,
A godlike man—of man the age-long need :
Boldly He swept away the lies forlorn
That veil'd the True, and gave Himself for Creed ;
For what Mankind had sigh'd for was a Head,
Tearful Humanity's diviner Chief,
Example's brighter Conscience, who could lead
The way to regions of sublime relief,
Yet lowly bend to woe—partaking human grief.

Oh, how I watch'd the bettering that should be
As rose this God on Earth's distracted rim !
What came ? Priests quench'd his life in agony,
Though light he left they could not all bedim.
But now again they make a God of Him !
Him ? No ! They deified their own deceit,
Lust of dominion, cruelty of whim,
And took their stand upon his tomb, to beat
Down all its fair bequests with false profaning feet.

There is malignancy in holy things,
Which Hell may envy. So sad harvest bore
The Creed that sprung with Angel heraldings.
“Peace and Goodwill”—that banner floated o'er
Crowds mad for conquest, battlefields of gore ;
Meek vows of Poverty wrought golden greed :
So was the World worse tortured than of yore,
For the fair cover to the hideous deed,
It mask'd, did mockery add that bosoms more might bleed.

In the beginning, King and Priest were one.
 They sever'd then, and on each other glared
 Asking, "Which has the strength?" But soon were done,
 Their useless wars. They found all power was shared
 So equally between them, neither dared
 (For both were first Ideas) reign alone:
 So they join'd hands, and sociably prepared
 Two engines, call'd the Altar and the Throne,
 By whose mere names mankind were flat and trembling thrown.

As earthward flew Heaven's bark, what need to tell
 The quenchings of God's light that met my ken;
 Huss, thy dread pyre, or Galileo's cell,
 Or flaming Acts of Faith, whose brands were men;
 Dark torturers gliding to foul secret den
 To wring recantings from the lips—not heart—
 And monsters set up as God's mirrors, when
 The very beasts might at their actions start,
 "Infallible" proclaim'd when most from truth they start!

- So wrought the priestly ones, that they might press
 To one low level souls of every height,
 Agreement of a hideous brutishness,
 Whose sole concordat was—"The priests are right!"
 But one small matter had escaped their sight;
 Their very selves by no means could agree
 Together! Furious they began to fight
- In internecine combat—knee to knee—
 With such a deadly rage as wonder'd me to see.

Fill up one city all with infidels,
Another with believers. The first hath
Great peace. The second with loud warfare swells,
Till it grows hush by grim repose of death :
For pious men will stop each other's breath,
And eat each other up (as spiders do),
If they but differ a pin's point in faith !
I watch'd them, how they mangled, burnt, and slew
The brothers of their love ! Then came a change of view :

The San-Benitos, and the torment-caves,
The days of the old torture had swept by ;
Men burnt no longer upon barrel-staves—
Was the World better'd ? Less pain met the eye ;
'Twas the old tale—more inner agony !
The Christian Virtues, whom at first I took
For the Seven Deadly Sins, had mission high,
With mental firebrand, pully, wheel and hook,
To pounce on damnèd souls that dared for truth to look.

By this time I had near'd the earth again,
And saw the well-known sphere below me turn.
What was its state ? Transition !—a new pain,
Which yet, methought, might a glad Future earn.
Roads, newly made, where raw materials churn,
Are hard to travel, but to quagmires may,
After long treading, firm consistence learn :
So hoped I ; but too early was the day,
For the old senseless things not yet had pass'd away.

Here stood the Pyramids, and there the Priest !
Both, it may be, a little worse for wear ;
Both, in their mysteries of potted beast,
Rather too rifled by the searching air ;
Yet, on the whole, in very good repair,
And frowning on the desert of mankind
Much as of yore. The priests had wisdom there,
To keep themselves in ancient pomp enshrined ;
For over men strange spells Antiquity doth bind.

With old-world hat, triangularly vast,
And the straight swathing of a rigid gown,
How like a walking mummy of the Past
The Priest stalk'd ancient through the modern town,
Trying to kill joy's flutter with his frown,
Looking the thing he was — a landmark old —
Which mortals fear'd to touch or tumble down ;
Though in some spirits prematurely bold [roll'd !
The waves of thought both round, and past the landmark

At his old work I found him ; patching thrones
And altars, that were rotten at the base,
And making bugbears up from teeth and bones,
And working miracles with solemn face :
“ For,” said he to himself, “ this railway pace
Of men and things will bring me to my end,”
(As some much hoped it might do, by God's grace)
So now he called Kings, in their turn, to lend
A helping hand to him, who was their ancient friend.

But King and Priest to severance now inclined,
Though still they did at tender friendship play :
The Church would rule alone ; the State had mind
Somewhat to clip and curb the priestly sway.
Which should be first some power aside to lay ?
A monarch has been known to abdicate :
A priest, never ! And he, who put away
His crown, came humbly to the Convent gate ;
So deem not 'twas the Priest who would his rule abate.


Think how the sacerdotal tyrant has
A double luxury ! Not only he
Sucks up the spirits of the abject mass,
But warms his body with their tithe and fee
Till he right purple in the face may be.
Could he to leave all this be tamed and school'd ?
No ! For his rule is his vitality !
So doth he drink the life-blood of the ruled :
Ah, woe to every soul that is by him befooled !

'Tis he who keeps mankind so base alway,
Because base things tremble a threat to hear.
With wretched instinct, he, for means of sway
Still loves to fret upon the springs of Fear :
And what so sure a helm, whereby to steer
The crowd, as the vague dread of the Unknown ?
But he himself is ever of bold cheer,
Saying, the Infinite to him is shown,
And that of the To-be he holds the keys alone.

"God with no passion staineth his bright works;
The punishment of sin is Consequence,
In which the jewel of instruction lurks;"
(So spoke my Guide) "But mark with what pretence
Of light the bigot blots all nobler sense
Of Nature's problems! Fierce enthroneth he,
Lording it o'er divine Intelligence,
The frown of a capricious Deity;
And yet one grain astray makes endless ruin be!

"Some think Disorder mars God's moral plan;
But Evil oscillates in certain bounds.
Ten thousand causes check the rage of man:
His utmost crimes a wall of brass surrounds;
Mere weariness exhausts War's yellings hounds;
And, if all fail, Death comes with his great wave,
That levels all the hollows and the mounds
Of human life. Who then shall be so brave
As of Confusion found in God's large thoughts to rave?"

"Yes!" I exclaimed. "Those ills that come by law
Are tolerable more than lawless ills
Which give the rein to vague mysterious awe,
Whose darkling dread the restless spirit fills
With dreams of Fate that in the sunshine kills:
But, when we know it is a plan that groups
Whate'er, in bounty, loving Wisdom wills,
The mortal eye, though tearful, never droops,
E'en when of rankèd Pain it marshals the stern troops."



Then quick I ran my glance about the globe
To find Religion link'd with Order's aim,
Ruling by love and light; but, with changed robe,
In every land the monster was the same.
'Tis true, fair realms cloak'd more the priestly game;
But how the Devil was drest I little reck'd,
If he as Juggernaut might worship claim,
Or as some decent object of respect,
Which partial mortals call'd the God of the Elect.

If, in the East, I saw a crushing car
Through bones and blood its hideous highway roll,
More sad I saw beneath the Western star
Monstrous Opinion plough into the soul.
Abhorrence o'er me held a less control
At God made hateful in an Idol's guise,
Than at His picture drawn upon the scroll
Of human passion, which itself supplies
The frown, the stare, the grin, the blank yet angry eyes.

Of this grim God the Bigot was the Power,
And set it in the dark men's souls to fright.
Ay, 'tis the dark that makes the bravest cower!
Man hates it as the child does! . . . Then my sight
Beheld a suffering man. A gentle wight
He was, who never harmed any one;
Yet priestly voices did his conscience blight,
And, standing 'twixt him and the midday sun,
He saw a demon-shape, and knew himself undone;

And so he died in madness. . . . Now I caught
Loud babbling voices from some nook unseen,
Clatter of tongues, discussing God and thought,
And what man's startling destiny might mean;
And every one a different way did lean :
Some thought man able and responsible,
Some called him clockwork, and a mere machine,
Some set up Duty, saying, " She works well !"
Others said, " Humbug !" and poor Duty downward fell.

One thought, Amusement was the end of life :
Another murmur'd, " In this tearful vale
Probation is the meaning of man's strife."
" Probation, in whose proving we must fail,"
Broke in a third, " for *you own* man was frail
At his first trial ; boots it he should try
A second fall ?" " All this is old and stale,"
Exclaim'd a fourth, " Life is—nay, haste to buy
(Then you will know it all) my new philosophy !"

Next on my ear a fervent whisper came ;
" Christ, my whole soul believes in Thee ! Oh not
In those who teach Thee ! not in cumbrous frame
Of theologic dogmas, nor in aught
That may conceal and tangle Thee from thought,
Not in Thy cross, not even in Thy blood,
But in Thyself ! I know not how was wrought
Thy wondrous being, but I know Thee good,
And take Thee for my Guide, my Hope, my spirit's food."

"A Christ your own sweet sentiments devise!"
 Taunted a dry voice, "you want sympathy!"
 To this succeeded a low plaint of sighs;
 "Alas for man! His prayer is blasphemy!
 To God for mercy he doth bend the knee
 Whose justice must be mercy; for His beck
 Rules all things, and His very sovereignty
 Binds him no atom of His work to wreck,
 But hold by endless Love almighty Power in check."

"Life to maintain, exalt, and propagate,"
 One gravely said, "In these three instincts lies
 The whole of man: all else is derivate.
 Three notes, but what unnumber'd harmonies!
 Three colours, but how varied are the dyes!"
 "Varied? Ah, hush! Life is a stagnant dyke,
 A grinding mill," a drawling voice replies;
 "Out of this sameness who a change can strike?
 I think of dying soon, to try what death is like."

Some tongues were talking of a world to come;
 Oft rang the words—"Reward and Punishment:"
 In other hearts I read (though these were dumb)
 A curious murmuring of discontent.
 "Enough" (they mused) "does this low world invent
 Of wretched motives, without making heaven
 A trafficking for capital and rent!
 Besides, to whom shall the rewards be given?
 They who would take them are just those of basest leaven!"

One lectured learnedly on mummies, dried
By slow vicissitudes of cold and heat,
Which of man's deathless hope a proof supplied
That to those homes his spirit back would fleet:
"Exactly the same process serves for meat,"
He added, "which a thousand years will keep
Its freshness, and e'en then be fit to eat."
"Indeed," cried some rash speaker, "this adds deep
Interest to your great theme! Thence pious joy I reap!"

Pertly a shrill voice said, "Development
Unlocks Creation! Rye doth turn to corn,
Snails may get wings—there's nothing to prevent—
By force of will! Man, from a monad born,
Of fish and reptile once the garb has worn;
Stars have been polypi!" "Does this make clear
Man's sufferings?" ask'd another. Silent scorn
Engulf'd the answer! "Oh," cried one, "stop here;
Man would want talk, could he all mysteries unsphere!"

While each loud mortal a disturbance bred
As if 'twere his opinion made the True,
I mark'd how God kept silence, and how dread
Unswerving Nature changed nor line nor hue
For any clamour of Earth's chattering crew.
"Yes!" cried out one, as answering to my thought;
"Did men confine their knowledge to their view,
Methinks to solid ground they might be brought,
But, led by lantern guess, they dance from nought to nought!"

Now, all this babble moved me not so much
(Although my faith was sinking to its term)
As one low voice, that did so deeply touch
My soul, it ruin'd there Hope's very germ.
Thus was it breathing, "Man is but a worm :
What can he know except his own crush'd fate?
His destiny is, nothing to affirm !
Religions flourish, and go out of date : [state!"
Look at yon crumbled shrines, how once they flush'd with

The Babylonian deem'd his gods were true ;
Thou, thine—which soon shall crumble with the rest.
Child of the dark, Life's secret why pursue ?
If the poor problem still eludes thy quest,
'Tis from its very nothingness unguess'd.
Lo ! cities buried for three thousand years,
Dug up to light, one only truth attest ;
That man his old habitual front uprears
Out of the cloudy Past, half bigotry, half tears.

" And what is History, and what Event ?
Time weaves new tales, or rather new from old,
To amuse the beldam Earth, who, century-bent,
In feeble state her ancient court doth hold
Midst vanities and gewgaws manifold.
'Tis but a patchwork this same human life,
Cobbled from shreds, together roughly roll'd ;
There is no meaning in its futile strife,
Its aims are dust—its hopes with emptiness are rife.

"Conscience, what is it? While the Saint is fill'd
With fears that once he haply crush'd a fly,
The dying Savage weeps he hath not kill'd
Enough men to look bright in heaven's eye.
Thou fool, believest thou in futurity?
Hast thou beheld it? Nay! But thou hast seen,
Or known, all living things are born to die!
Is God so good? Think so, and be serene!
But, in that case, He fails to effect what He doth mean."

My own soul caught th' infection. I was one
Of the poor human tribe: enormous doubt
Rush'd on me; all solution was undone
Of darkest riddles, wreathing me about.
I join'd the howling mob, and crièd out,
"Is this the best a Deity has dream'd?
Why then was man bestow'd with Godlike thought?
To eat, and suffer, why so subtly schemed?
The brute's small spark of soul him better had beseem'd!"

"Is it for this my vision hath explored
Gulf after gulf of human wretchedness?
For this? To learn that Sorrow is man's lord;
And the one bounty that should all things bless,
God's own Religion, worketh but distress,
Deepest of all, and of most hopeless blot,
Since e'en the great Redresser needs redress!
The proof—the proof" (I cried) "God hateth not
This miserable globe—Creation's blackest spot!"

“What if the Future should redeem the Past?”
Said the soft voice of him I in my pain
Had nigh forgotten; “what if Woe flies fast,
And Joy comes onward with her hoarded gain?
What if man burst his tomb, as the sown grain
The clod, and bear for fruit, Eternity?”
I said, “The thought is beautiful! But then
To balance Earth’s enormous agony,
How vast and full the joy of other worlds must be!”

“O let me, in large luxury of thought,
Imagine mansions, full of purer day,
To which all beings shall be duly brought—
Homes wove of light, where happy Angels may
Forget they once were mortals! Throw away
That key, the wards of life are too perplex’d
For resolution! O’er the Future’s ray
If but one shadow sweep, unduly vex’d,
This world of hideous gloom is darken’d by the next.

“But give a term unto all suffering,
So may this world be lovely in its place
Though in itself so desolate a thing;
To other worlds the threshold and the base,
Which to look back upon may have its grace:
But wilt thou not, O Angel, now unfold
Unto my longing sight how fair a face
The Future turns on men? What God doth mould
Of beauty out of pain?” The Angel said, “Behold!”

Half roused to hope, forward I bent my vision
To catch at joy, when on my ear was flung
From some far depth a low laugh of derision,
And, 'stead of Heaven, which should have then upsprung,
The universe from out my sight was wrung
Into a blank. 'T was darkness beyond name
That, like a curtain, straight before me hung ;
But on this curtain, sparks soon went and came
As in a mouldering scroll, that dieth out by flame.

There, by degrees, were printed on my sight
The foulest forms that fever's dream may mark ;
Entwining spectres, writ in their own light
Upon the breast of the detested dark :
And corpses glimmer'd there, that, blue and stark,
Yet seem'd to glare out from their ghastly eyes
With something of a wild distracted spark
Of tortured life. Still did they sink and rise,
Vanish and reappear—then did again demise.

And I had glimpses of a burning sea,
Wherein a million, million, faces, wrench'd
With anguish, were uptoss'd continually :
And, sometimes, gorgeous forms with water drench'd
That gulf, which, nathless, still remain'd unquench'd.
There, too, one wander'd, bound to a worse goal.
With flame and darkness was his body trench'd ;
And his pale forehead bore a dusky scroll,
Whereon was writ in fire, " I am a damnèd soul !"

Now, as I look'd upon the whirling storm
Of the great hell, upholden unto me,
I saw with wonder that its total form
Made up a vast corporeality,
In shape a man—misfashion'd hideously—
Having horns, and hoofs, and tail. "This," said my Guide,
"Is Satan, who is call'd God's enemy,
But is the Great Imperfect deified!"
"Save us from Satan!" then a thousand voices cried.

And yet, athwart this noisy hate, I read
O Satan, thou to mortal love hadst claim!
Thou ready thunder of the bigoted,
Scapegoat of evil, target of all blame,
When men dared whisper not another name,
Cutting all gordian riddles for the nonce,
Methought the world without thee had gone lame;
And, wert thou proved the drivel of a dunce,
Old women, fools, and priests might yield the ghost at once.

The warning Angel said, "Remember thou,
These terrors that put on so foul a face
Are but, in truth, a thick fantastic show
Of vapours, which I to their source can trace."
I murmur'd, "May I also know their place
Of birth?" "Behold it!" cried the Voice aloud;
And, lo, I saw, before the curtain's base,
Of mortals an innumerable crowd,
Whose reeking breath it was, sent up that hideous cloud.

The Angel said, " 'Tis sad ! But sadder still
Is this : — The breathers of that ghastly veil
Are not the mortals whom the vapours kill
And suffocate. The poison they exhale
Harms not themselves, but only doth assail
The weaker throng, who stand behind their backs,
And pant for air, and, as their spirits fail,
Are, by the falsehood which their sight attacks,
For evermore outstretch'd on thought's most subtle racks."


Then of the Crowd I read the hopeless pain.
God's inner consolations — oh, how fair
Their light would have been woven with the grain
Of life's great darkness ! But the blacken'd air
Gave only back the wringings of despair,
That told the anguish of the common mind ;
" Why were we born ? The dismal clock of care
Hath counted all our moments ! None are kind
To us ; and yet men say, Hell lieth yet behind !

" What ? Hell the meed of Hell endured on Earth ?
Call you this justice ? Silence, judge unjust !
If but one day in seven we plead for mirth,
Shall we hereafter into flames be thrust ?
Once dead, that we should crumble into dust
Were grace for which to thank Omnipotence ;
But, in the endless Future, if we must
Again have torture chain'd upon our sense,
We clench our hands at thee, thou bitter Providence !"

Then burst a cloud of sound, immingled wild,
Whose voice was vapour, from the bigot-quire !
Here did a mother teach her baby-child
A cheerful song about eternal fire.
There Priests yell'd out, to an old creaking lyre,
" Exult, ye Saints ! Now Heaven for you is won !"
There shall your souls so piously aspire
That e'en a mother, looking on her son
Parching in flames, shall cry, ' O God, thy will be done !' "

" God ? " shrill'd a voice of keen melodious tone ;
" There is no God ! " " O impious ! " shouted all.
" Nay, pious ! " said the strange perverted one ;
" Better to have no God than Him you call
The Maker ! Better that Earth's dreary ball
Should not be laid at Deity's bright door,
But be the work of Chance, or dancing fall
Of clever atoms, that knew how to store
A World—yet had no thought to make man's bosom sore ! "

Then to that voice was join'd a chorus loud,
" There is no God ! There is no future state !
Come, share the blessedness, ye suffering crowd !
Get ye not rid of an enormous weight ?
Ye need not bend before a dream of hate,
Feeling, the while, how far yourselves arise
Above the thronèd demon men create :
For which of ye, though cruel, would devise,
E'en for his bitterest foe, eternal agonies ? "



"And all this might be spared," the Angel said,
"If ~~piety~~ were pious! Yet, within
The ~~foggy~~ tumult by Religion bred,
My finer ear some accents sweet can win
Of true meek souls, unheard amidst the din :
Men who, although they wear the Priest's array,
Have faith and truth of heavenly origin ;
And they may triumph in some better day.
But now 'tis time I sweep this lying cloud away."

A rustle, tender as a dove's soft wing
When she stoops downward from some airy height,
Out of its grief did my sad spirit bring :
And suddenly my heavenly Guide, from sight
Held hitherto, took visibly his flight
Before me ; turning on me, as he pass'd
Into the air, a face of love and might
Which may not into mortal words be cast :
Lofty his stature was ; his pinions wide and vast.

His shining garments on the dusk were traced
Like pathway'd moonbeams on a mountain lake,
Ripples of light with softer light enchased ;
So to the crowd his journey he did take :
Him distance did not dwarf, but loftier make
Unto my sight ; for, as he onward flew,
He seem'd to shine out clearer for my sake,
And still in just proportion met my view,
While higher, higher yet, his form dilating grew.

Toward the dark curtain of the Future he
Right onward sail'd, and took his stand before
The villain-crowd, whose breath was mystery.
That villain-crowd, how low their heads they bore
Beneath his presence ! Scarce upreaching more
Than to his heel ! Wonder in me had growth,
That such small things that mighty cloud could pour.
And now quick lightnings from the Angel's mouth
Came, like the summer-play of clouds in the warm South.

So the black curtain was inwove with light,
Shot through, and pierced with many thousand rifts,
Till its dark groundwork to th' embroidery bright
So yields itself, that now it melts and shifts
And runs to lighter edge, as vapour drifts
Before the great sun, when, from mountains wide,
And lakes and plains, a sullen storm he lifts ;
So was the dusky curtain glorified,
And then it all drew up. What was it I espied ?

Only the cloudless, moonless, starry heaven !
Gone was the strife of that tumultuous day
With which my soul so wearily had striven ;
Earth, far beneath me, in deep shadow lay
Breathless, as if her life had ebb'd away
Into the sky. Then, stealingly and still,
I felt the star-beams touch me, as if they
Loosed in my bosom some far-frozen rill,
And thus sent wandering forth my thoughts without my will.

“ Ye silent answers to the tortured Earth,
Each night new-born to youth's divinity,
God's covenant with man, death's living birth,
Ye stars, the farthest wonders that man's eye
Can commerce with, and yet to him so nigh
Ye in his bosom palpitate and dart ;
Ye tender stars, beloved of Infancy
Asking, Who made you ? Never can ye part
From man, his worship old, still lingering at his heart.

“ Do ye not give the room for which souls pant,
When swells in them their fetter'd nobleness ?
Enlarge ye not their prison poor and scant,
And make the crowded heap of their distress
Seem but a grain beside the Numberless ?
Yes ! Ye co-equals of the Mystery, Space,
Ye are the utmost man can grasp or guess
Of time unending, or dim-shadow'd place, [trace.
Where thought rolls onward still all boundaries thought can

“ Are ye not Trust—unchanged through dreams of change,
Far-floating fears, by fancy's wing upbuoy'd,
Dim glimpses through the dark, traditions strange
Of cycles, and the world to be destroy'd —
Glimmerings, that fade and tremble in the void —
Or guesses of the pale astrologer,
Who with your doom-books hath too rashly toy'd ?
Ye fixèd ones, what eye hath seen you stir
Since mark'd by Chaldee old, your ancient Chronicler ?

“ Distance deceives the sight ! Ye move and sway
With life ; yet are your hoverings on the brink
Of ruin, but the freedom and the play
That bind your dance of beauty, link to link,
In woven joy that shall not fail nor shrink !
Still are ye deathless beacon-lights to Pain,
And watchful Sorrow. Thrones arise and sink,
Earth is transform'd beneath you ! ye remain,
Clasping distracted man with Order's sacred chain.


“ Do I not climb in you, O blessèd host,
The way of symbols, shining steps to God ?
When most man knows you, he is certain most
One law unswerving reigns from star to clod.
Then is not safety's path by mortals trod ?
Yes ! Grief and Sin, and all man's life that mars
Shall seem, when touch'd by Faith's divining rod,
Star-clouds of light, not yet resolved to stars,
Which from the grasp of truth man's feeble vision bars.”

Now was I made aware, by holy shine,
That a dear form was nestling to my side,
Like hers, who the Hell-seeing Florentine
Up to the height of heaven accompanied.
’Twas she, my Beatrice, my promised bride,
Whose face I saw ! And, though she spake no word,
Her thoughts did, in some spiritual manner, glide
Into my soul, whose fine ear caught each chord
Of her soul's music — and these harmonies I heard :

“ Could’st thou believe me dead ? Thy living sense
Mistook itself ! Howe’er the spirit deems,
Death cannot lie in life’s experience.
Thou hast beheld me in thy dearest dreams,
Not cold and still, but rather girt with beams
Of health and bloom, which hues of earth are weak
To imitate ! Ah, trust those wiser gleams
And intuitions, which the climate bleak
Of earthly life sends back to founts they warmly seek.

“ Two, who shall look to God with joined eye,
This the great secret, this the topmost flower
Which man, himself the tree of life, folds by
In the small wrappings of a mortal hour.
Trustfully wait that deathless crown of Power !
Be true ! Be bold ! Truth, Love, and Courage are
A noble Trinity ! Take them for dower !
I, thy predestined one, through life shall share
Thy joy, thy grief, thy hope ; if need be, thy despair !

“ Belovèd, reason thus : Life’s little span
Exhausts the anguish of the Infinite ;
And the dark crowded wretchedness of man
Must, since God frameth all things to the height
Of His perfection, blossom into light.”
She ceased. I murmur’d, “ Art thou happy ? thou ? ”
She only answer’d by a smile so bright
It brought the real morning ; and I now
Knew what a weight of sleep had melted from my brow.



The dream is over. Thou, who to the end
Hast travell'd with me, comrade of my thought,
Stranger, farewell to thee as to a friend
Met on a journey, dearer than if sought!
One word at parting. When the mystery-fraught
Burthen of sorrow on thy soul is thrown,
Be thy glad oracles from Nature caught
Which shall be Sorrow's answer. Not alone
On Sinäi God wrote, nor on mere leaves of stone.

THE SECOND GATE.

L O V E.

“ All thoughts, all passions, all delights,
Whatever stirs this mortal frame,
Are all but ministers of Love.”

COLERIDGE.



LOVE.

EDWARD AND ALICE.—A DUOLOGUE.

SCENE.— *A comfortable Dwelling-room.*

Personages.— EDWARD and ALICE.

EDWARD.

Is baby asleep?

ALICE.

Yes, dearest! Scarce had I
Sung her the little hymn you made for me,
When she was in the mystery of sleep;
So far from me!

EDWARD.

Aye, far from you, indeed!
Alice, when *you* sleep, though I hold your hand,
You do not seem my own, but gone away

To some far world where I can follow not.
'Tis true a touch would call you back again,
But it seems like a bold irreverence
To take you out of God's arms.

ALICE.

With a kiss?

Methinks, the profanation were not great!

EDWARD.

Nay, nay! Instead of that I'll kiss you now.

ALICE.

You shall not! We must talk about the poem
You read to me last night.

EDWARD.

What think you of it?

ALICE.

I think your Mystery of Life will be
Pronounced a dreary poem by the world,
Which says already you are *toujours triste*.

EDWARD.

A dreary poem? Well, I know it is.

ALICE.

Why write it, then?

EDWARD.

Have you not guess'd my object?

ALICE.

Not quite.

EDWARD.

But, Alice, let me ask you first,
Is, or is not, my Mystery like life?

ALICE.

Well; all you say about the sufferings
There are in the world, is doubtless very true;
But yet—ah, how unlike the life I know
Your poem is!

EDWARD.

You flatter me, dear Alice!

ALICE.

Life is to me a beautiful thing—nay, *was*
Even before I knew you.

EDWARD.

Now, indeed,

You do not flatter me.

ALICE.

Nay, hear me out!

I loved the sunshine, and the singing-birds,
And in the great woods gather'd primroses,
Of which I made a pillow for my head,
Strewing them down upon the mossy stone
That overhung my favorite waterfall:
And I had gay rides through the summer-lanes,
And my heart beat with joy, but more with hope,
Else I, perhaps, had never had a heart
That could have loved at all. . . .

EDWARD.

I grant you that.

ALICE.

Sir, do not interrupt me! Putting you

Out of the question, I had happy days
When I was in the country; but the joy
Was to look forward into untried life,
To think what London might be like, and balls
(I own I do love dancing!); then I wish'd
To see great Authors, on whose works I hung,
But on none so much as yours.

EDWARD.

Ah, flatterer!

ALICE.

You know what follow'd! Have not we been happy?
So then I do not find your picture of life
In all the past of my experience;
Nor, to speak truly, in the present either.
'Tis hard for me to tell my thought, but thus,
Methinks, I give a little glimpse of it.
We two, now sitting here by this snug fire,
In this nice pretty room, with books about,
I with my work, you with your newspaper,
Do seem to me so much unlike your poem.
Are we of sorrow thinking? Not a bit!
Even that ivory card-basket, which holds
The visitors' cards that you are fingering,
Does to my fancy tell another tale
Than did your verses. There is our engagement
To dine with Mistress Crump. Here I perceive
A ticket for a pleasure-trip to-morrow
By rail. Now is this life, or is it not?

EDWARD.

My dearest, it is life, and it is not;
 'Tis truth, and yet 'tis fiction. This is sure—
 We poets have a knack of getting tired
 Of the world's life; and, when the gay outside
 Fatigues us, we pierce down to the substratum,
 Where there are heart-aches plenty. Perhaps I wrote
 In such an earnest melancholy mood
 To get rid of the thought of Mistress Crump,
 And her perpetual smile. No, 'twas not that!
 Dear child, my real object was — But are you
 Sworn to the deepest secrecy?

ALICE.

Yes, yes!

You really make me curious!

EDWARD.

Well, then,

The real object of the poem was
 To prove by *ex-absurdo* argument
 (Having taught you some small Latin I may venture
 The phrase) that this world is itself a hell
 So true, and ~~men~~ such demons, it was needless
 To invent a hell to come. Are you much shock'd?

ALICE.

Not very much.

EDWARD.

But, Alice, understand me:
 I do not mean to debar men from the joy
 Of thinking worse of others than themselves,
 For I would have a good corrective Hell

In store behind the coffin and the worm,
 Where each might place his neighbour. To speak now
 More seriously—I wanted in the future
 To point at something better in accord
 With the known goings on of God and Nature
 Than the Gehenna that the bigot frames.
 I see not why the death of man should change
 The way of God, nor why, if Remedy
 Be under all corruption, and make flowers
 Spring out of dunghills, Remedy should fail
 Just when most wanted.

ALICE.

Dearest Edward, you know
 You to your saving creed have me convert,
 And I have been a great deal happier since.
 Nay, I can never think this creed is evil,
 For, when I talk'd with Mister Orthodox
 The other day about it, he cried out,
 "'Tis perilous, 'tis downright heresy,
 Which I must preach against; but would to God
 I could believe as you do!" But all this
 Is not just now what I was thinking of.
 I want to ask you who that being is
 Whom in your poem you call Beatrice;
 I'm jealous of her!

EDWARD.

I suppose as I
 Am jealous, deadly jealous, of one Arthur,
 A cousin, who was your playmate!

ALICE.

Nay, but this
Is much more serious! You make Beatrice
Say she was your predestined one. I'm sure
I never called Arthur that!

EDWARD.

Nay, pretty wife,
Surely by this time you must know that poets
Are Fiction's playmates, and make up a whole,
Just as Apelles did construct his Venus,
From shreds cull'd here and there, so that their words
Are, like all language, only veils to truth.
Suppose that you yourself are Beatrice,
And I was only making you a secret.
A secret! oh it is the nicest thing
In life!

ALICE.

All very pretty, Edward; but
You did not know me in your childish days
Like that same Beatrice!

EDWARD.

That's shrewdly put.
Come! I'll not tell you stories, though my rule
Is always to tell stories when I'm question'd.
There *was* a Beatrice!

ALICE.

I was sure of it!

EDWARD.

But you, who are so clever, and read Shakespeare,

Know that all loving hearts have many a love
Before a Juliet ; nay, all Juliets
Romeos by dozens, ere they find the true one.
You had yours I am sure !

ALICE.

Fie, Edward !

EDWARD.

Ah, you blush !

But to my story ! Years and years ago
My Beatrice, whose real name was Anne ——

ALICE.

(A name that I detest !)

EDWARD.

Was a sweet child
That I enshrined in my boyish heart,
But who, I dare say, had I married her,
Would have plagued me nicely, for I know she had
A temper of her own.

ALICE.

Had she dark hair ?

EDWARD.

Yes, and dark eyebrows, and a curious face
Like one in an old picture. There was much
Romance in my first seeing her, in her old
Paternal hall. I mean, the real hall
Of an old mansion, where we dined in summer ;
That is, Anne's family, and mine. She had
Just come from school, and I first saw her sitting
Under a portrait of some ancestress

Drawn by Sir Peter Lely, and 'twas strange,
She was so like that portrait, that I started
As if I had seen a ghost; for it was just
As if the child in the picture had stepp'd down
To act its double.

ALICE.

Quite enough of Anne!
I'm tired of her! We'll talk of something else!
I want to know what poetry you have written
About me.

EDWARD.

Why, you know the famous sonnets
I wrote, when I was courting you, and when
Our course of true love did not run quite smooth,
Because your aunt threw stones in it.

ALICE.

Well, well,
Have you writ poems about other girls?

EDWARD.

Nay, I'll confess, not all the love-poems
In my portfolio are about yourself.
But now I dedicate them all to you:
Is't not enough?

ALICE.

I do not know; but really
There are some of your poems I would not have had
Address'd to me.

EDWARD.

Why so?

ALICE.

Because some are
Not true of me ; as that in which you say,
"Thou art not beautiful, thy cheek is pale !"

EDWARD.

Oh, that was a wild figment of my brain !
I wanted to contrast the heroine
Of my love-sonnets with the usual run
Of poetry dames, who always are so lovely,
And have such chisell'd features. Poor dear things,
What pain that chiselling process must have cost them !

ALICE.

I'm sure you would not have loved me, had I been
Hump-back'd !

EDWARD.

Oh, think not, sweet, that I impeach
Your beauty . . . say, your fairy prettiness,
Which is much better than beauty, or affirm
You are too pale, seeing that on your cheek
Is blooming such a tender china rose !
Besides, would not you rather be yourself
Than Mistress Turnbull, the great florid beauty ?

ALICE.

I want to hear the stanzas that you told me
You had written about our steam-trip to Geneva,
For those I know for certain were for me,
And nobody else.

EDWARD.

Here they are, dearest child !

(*He reads.*)

VERSES TO ALICE.

Our voyage by the steam-boat
I never can forget,
When first I went a-touring
With you, my pretty pet :
The voyage to Geneva
Upon the Lake Leman,
Oh, was not that a pleasure
Which through our being ran ?

The stopping at the stations—
The glee again to start—
The dear good prosy people
From whom we sat apart ;
All, all to us was gladness,
Warm life, and summer glow ;
And such a heaven above us,
And such a wave below !

In emeralds and in sapphires
The waters by did break ;
The long smoke cast its shadow
Upon the azure lake.
We look'd into the crystal,
We let our eye-beam whirl
Along the diamond bubbles,
The eddy and the curl.

Our silence and our prattle
Alike a joy did bring ;
And sometimes we said nothing,
And sometimes everything.
We look'd to bay and headland,
High peaks and rocky shelves ;
And then, in all the universe,
We only saw ourselves.

“That is the great Mont Blanc, Love !
Do, Alice, lift your veil !”
(So ran our talk). . . . “Oh, Edward, look
How birdlike is that sail !”
“See what a big fat lady !”
“Hush, dear, she'll think we mock !”
“What does she carry ?” “Why, my sweet,
That is an Alpen-stock !”

And now into the cabin
Our merry steps incline,
Where we take a little dinner,
And some jolly Yvorne wine.
All at our own snug table :—
Then, if we hear a rout,
From the little oval window
On tiptoe we peep out.

The steamboat has a library—
What funny caricatures !

Ah, Alice, bending over them,
 How oft my cheek met yours !
 The cabin's hot ! so up I take
 The traps I carried down :
 See ! yonder lies Geneva !
 Oh pretty water-town !

We glide into the harbour ;—
 What a crowd to see us land !
 “ We'll put up at the Ecu,
 It looks so nice and grand !”
 Dear Alice, you remember ?
 Yes ! you know what then I said !
 “ My little wifey, can it be
 A week since we were wed ?”

ALICE.

Well, that is rather pretty, but too mocking
 For my taste. I prefer the little poem,
 In which you gave such excellent reasons why
 We should not go to London. Read me that.

(He reads.)

Let us go to the city, and all its delights,
 Its throngs of bright women, and thought-breathing men,
 Its days of soft languor, and long festive nights :
 Let us go, O my Alice,—but when ?

Shall we go when Spring's first thrilling motion is felt ?
 When the snow-drops peep forth, and the crocuses blow,

When the heart is unthaw'd as the icicles melt?

Can we, then, leave our garden? Ah no!

Shall we go when the sweet summer rose-time is come?

When the nightingale sings from our favourite grove?

When the sunsets are fairest? Oh no, in our home

Then, my Edward, there's too much to love!

Shall we go when the Year, like a friend, from this earth

Flying heavenward, beams us its loveliest smile?

Can we then quit our vine-bower, our gay harvest mirth?

No. Yet we'll delay for a while!

Shall we go, when the winter-storm makes our hearth dear,

When shouts little Edward the white snow to see,

When our work, and our play, and our books give such cheer?

No, not then! That were sadness to me!

Let us go to the city, and all its delights,

Its throngs of bright women, and thought-breathing men,

Its days of soft languor, its long festive nights;

Let us go, O my Alice,—but when?

ALICE.

And so we did not go, from then to this!

Next year, perhaps, we shall. Now read me some

Of the love-poems.

EDWARD.

No, no! you would ask

Too many questions as to times, and places,

And persons. No, *I* will not venture on
That perilous task ! See ; here is the whole bundle,
Which you may ransack, and guess over at
Your leisure. But, to ease your mind I hint
That many of these poems were mere fancies,
And, when I strung them in a line together,
I meant the whole to form a sort of Myth,
Shadowing the search of that poor desolate Psyche,
The human soul, after the full great Love
Which mostly flies the moment it is seen.

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LOVE SONNETS.


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LOVE SONNETS.

I.

THE tear to sever, and the smile to meet,
These are men's common dower ; yet might appear
From me long sever'd by a Fate severe—
From me, around whose early-happy feet
Love gush'd like rivers. Ah, then, how replete
With vernal promise was thy parting tear !
Welcome's own kiss was ne'er to me so dear,
Nor fill'd existence with a joy so sweet.
Could I but tell thee how that tender flood
Refresh'd the thirsty Egypt of my soul,
What joy and spring-tide revel in my blood
Whene'er its golden waves through memory roll,
Then might I rate that tear which gave my mind
A whole redemption back to human-kind.



II.

Since I was worth thy tear I rise in worth,
And am a Cræsus in my own esteem.
But yesterday I did so lowly seem,
Methought my best of fulness was but dearth :
Now, I might marvel, when I wander forth,
Men see no glory round my forehead stream.
How sweet it is, well of one's self to deem !
'T is nothing to be 'scorn'd, and made a mirth
By others ; but self-lower'd who can live ?
And I had been the Scripture prodigal
Who roam'd a region where no soul can thrive,
A hot bright land, whose glowing fruits are gall.
And, in this journey, I had spent my all,
But thou didst welcome back the fugitive !

III.


We have read stories in our childish days
Of princes suffering transformation strange,
Whom fairies into trees or stones did change,
Or dragon-monsters, whom no power could raise
Out of their misery and dull amaze,
Till some fair Princess with the peerless eyes
The poor imprison'd souls should recognise,
And, venturing all on intuition's gaze,
Should love them for themselves. Oh, there is truth
In fables, to which wisdom cannot reach !
I was that stone, that beast ! Thou, in full sooth,
Wert the dear Princess, who my soul did teach
There's but one spell which can time's debt remove,
Only the ransom of transcendent love.

IV.

Yet, had thy tears from pity only flow'd,
Those precious drops had never from my brain
Effaced so much of old habitual pain,
Or from my heart removed so dull a load.
Yes, yes ! 'Twas Love, all-brightening Love, that show'd
His gleaming face athwart that balmy rain,
And shot a rapture I could scarce sustain ;
'Twas Love that in one look a life bestow'd !
Then was the secret of long years made plain
As by a lightning flash. And not alone
That light reveal'd thy bosom, but my own
Unto myself. I felt the hidden chain
Which, from the moment I had look'd on thee,
Had pass'd around my heart, and bound me silently.

V.

A seed chance-sown beneath a golden clime
Thy Love had stolen into a lovely flower,
Fairer than any bloom of garden-bower.
Who had foreshadow'd such a growth sublime
From aught so lowly in its natal prime,
Or deem'd the sullen Past could ever shower
So fresh a promise and so sweet a dower
Won from the depths of old neglected Time ?
Who had predicted that one gentle look,
A soft word spoken in a careless hour
Would so thy being to its depths have shook,
And ruled thy life with an abiding power ?
That the dear love, which life-long I had sought,
Should come to me unbidden, and unbought ?



VI.

The moments, which unto thy memory made
A boundless store, by me were half forgot ;
I was enrich'd, and yet I knew it not :
O'er their great wealth my thoughts unconscious stray'd,
Like careless steps o'er gold-mines unbetray'd
Beneath the bareness of some desert spot.
Beloved by thee, I mourn'd my loveless lot,
And dwelt for ever in a dreary shade,
Which pale distrust upon my soul had cast.
For ancient fealty I had seen outworn,
And many a vow, to me most deeply sworn,
Time's rude advance had number'd with things past :
And I had said I would not love again :
Ah foolish words ! How impotent and vain !

VII.

As he, the slave of prodigality,
Sitting midst ruins of his great unthrift,
Should he, perchance, a careless look uplift,
And see some priceless gem, of old cast by,
Gleaming upon him, like a spirit's eye,
From some dim drawer, or age-forgotten rift,
Feels sudden life, and, to the treasure swift
Hastening, weeps tears that on his heart did lie,
So, lost and lonely, I, the spendthrift heir
Of riches that my riot had run through,
Look'd on my fate, and saw a jewel there
Worth all my lost and scatter'd revenue,
Thy love, forgotten in my lavish waste,
Found in my need, and seized with trembling haste.

VIII.

I never deem'd that word or look of mine
Could be placed out to so large usury
As in thy Love's deep treasure-house doth lie:
My careless thought fail'd rightly to divine
How trifles might grow rich transferr'd to thine,
And so, long time, I pass'd Heaven's bounty by;
For we are slaves to hard reality,
And rest our hopes on toil and deep design,
Looking for harvests only where we sow,
Or gain where we adventure merchandise.
Now, taught by thee, I learn a creed more wise:
I gave thee nought, yet thou didst all bestow.
True Love can equal traffic never know,
Or how did thine to this perfection rise?

IX.

Joys come most sweet that unexpected come.
When Morn steals on, we scarce admire the Day;
But, if through vapours burst the sudden ray,
No frame-work seems so beautiful as gloom
For sunbeams. So when to my spirit's tomb
Came the warm breathing of thy genial May,
Winter and Spring conflicting there did play
With interchanging charm and added bloom.
Now, in my bosom so divinely meet
The present happiness, the past annoy,
As to make double wonder—double joy.
How can I tire of these surprises sweet?
Joy laid o'er sorrow I so fair have found,
I would not wish away that sullen ground.

X.

From the soft maze of sweet astonishment
I am not yet return'd. I ask the beam
Of earliest morning, if I do but dream
This wealth of heart, or how, when all was spent,
I was enrich'd with such a full content
That I can look on forest, hill, and stream,
With childhood's eyes. As yet no guiding gleam
Marshals my thoughts, which, all in gladness blent,
Know not themselves. Then pardon this dull chime,
Which o'er and o'er the self-same thing doth say.
My joy is only in its trembling prime,
And therefore is my fond uncertain lay
Like to a bird's prelude note in spring,
A blissful, low, uncertain murmuring.

XI.

He who loves best knows most. Then why should I
Let my glad thoughts so far, so restless rove
In quest of light to comprehend thy love,
Or seek to pierce the tender mystery,
Whose sweet solution in the heart doth lie,
How came this good for which I never strove.
To the dear secret I no nearer move;
Nor life nor love are read by scrutiny.
Yet still I would untwist this wondrous coil
To its beginnings; and could trace for ever
The little streams that made this mighty river,
Knowing the while how vain is all my toil.
Why, silly heart, so fond the search to press?
'Tis that the search itself is happiness!

XII.

The more we know, the more we wildly stray
From knowledge; and the more our minds by preaching
Of men are clouded, we put out the ray
Which from anterior founts our souls are reaching;
So all untaught we are from over-teaching:
But, when we love, we do ourselves assay
By wisdom, that, without our poor beseeching,
Lights up our sordid sepulchres of clay
From inward. Then, beloved, what endless debt
I owe to thee; what stores miraculous
Of large illumination, which doth set
All things in sunlight, and transfigures thus
To joy the earth's sad riddle! Can I be
Of God distrustful? God has given me thee!

XIII.

Thou art not beautiful! Thy cheek is pale:
Thine eyes' blue sparkle seldom quits the screen
Of the droop'd lashes that it dwells between.
Thou art not eloquent! Thy lips avail
Only to utter the heart's simplest tale,
Such as from immemorial time hath been:
So dost thou move through crowds, unheard, unseen
As any dweller in the loneliest vale.
'Tis well! Be beautiful for me alone!
Let me to thee, and to thy soul's rich dower,
Be as the night is to that bashful flower,
Which hath no sweetness till the day is done,
And only to the stars and tender gloom
Trust the dear secret of its fragrant bloom.

XIV.

Men say that Love is blind. O much mistaken !
He is clear-sighted as the crystal eyes
That watch at midnight in unclouded skies.
Is he not quick to note when Faith is shaken ?
Doth he not mark what chords he can awaken
Unto the measure of his sympathies ?
The golden miracle of wealth that lies
In humble hearts would be a mine forsaken
If he discern'd it not. What then imposes
The thought that Love is blind on erring men ?
'Tis that sometimes his outward eyes he closes
To ope the lustre of his inward ken,
Wherewith he unimagined worlds can see
While he sits musing, as I now on thee.

XV.

Love is not Vanity. Oh, rather say
That all besides is Vanity on earth !
Tell me huge Glory hath a narrow girth,
Call Wisdom idle—Pleasure, Wealth, and Sway
Ill beds whereon an aching heart to lay,
And I will own them valued to their worth :
But the sweet comrade of our household hearth
Takes not his stand with attributes of clay,
Or the dull shows of circumstance and time.
He is a substance midst the shadowy strife
Of Earth's vain forms—a life within our life—
Enduring ever in eternal prime.
Have I writ false ? Then is there nothing true,
Sweetest, in this wide world ;—not even you !

XVI.

I have loved others, that I do confess;
 But they were never sovereigns of my scene,
 Nor e'er have been to me what you have been.
 Stray sympathies have cross'd my loneliness,
 Poor scatter'd vagrants in a flimsy dress;
 But you are of my tunèd thoughts the Queen;
 I harvest you—the rest I did but glean—
 My soul of you was but premonitress.
 Therefore I deem of those my loves of yore,
 As one might, when the fruit is on the bough,
 Of spring-tide blossoms that exist no more,
 And were fruit's harbingers, all vanish'd now.
 Yet they have served one use—the best and last—
 They make you jealous even of my past.

XVII.

Is there a speck of time, in time's great round,
 I think not of thee? But there needs no deep
 Of thought thy presence in my soul to keep:
 Were I in alien meditation drown'd,
 Within me still thou would'st be felt and found:
 And thou canst visit me in silent sleep
 Without a dream; and to my bosom creep
 When all my sum of sense is fastly bound.
 What marvel then, when I some book do read,
 Thy face steals in betwixt me and the page,
 And, ere itself my wandering spirit heed,
 Gifts me with moments worth a blissful age;
 Or, when my lips play in the world their part,
 I'm always talking with you in my heart?

XVIII.

Nor glad my dawn, nor tempestless my day.
My own best self lay hidden in a cloud,
Which almost me from my own thoughts did shroud.
Speech, only quick to blush its own delay,
Made me a fool, when fools had their own way,
And awkward-silent when Conceit was loud.
So low my youth by tyrants had been bow'd
I half distrusted my clear judgment's ray :
But now, through thee, I to a bright hour climb
When the weak mists of accident shall drift
Away from me, and, more than in the prime
Of any morn, which clouds may smother swift,
My soul shall visibly its strength uplift
Like the great Alps that clear at evening-time.

XIX.

Thy fresh young feelings, gushing forth in words,
Sweet natural words, to me are musical
As the wind straying over the wild chords
Which he alone can waken, or the fall
Of gentle waters ever whispering
Their love to the lone woods. When comes my thrall,
Thy voice is to my spirit's troubled wing
The harp of David to the soul of Saul.
Oh, might I sit for ever at thy side,
What care could touch me then ? What demons dare
Make havoc in my soul beatified ?
But, when no more thy accents soothe my ear,
Too oft, with stormy shadow and unrest,
The banish'd fiend returns unto my breast.

XX.

Thou hast profess'd me nothing, therefore more
I do believe thee. Others have been loud
As they were empty, broke what they had vow'd,
And, glib and blushless, halted not to pour
Of oaths and sacraments a ready store
That had fulfilment nowhere. Only thou
Hast look'd oaths, but not spoke them. 'T was thy brow,
And not thy voice, that still my trust upbore.
When I have ask'd thee, "Wilt thou swear to me?"
Thou hast said, "No; I may perchance forswear
Myself. Words are but poor fidelity!"
Yet what I ask'd thee never came to air;
Though well I know full often mountains came
Between my wish and its accomplish'd aim.

XXI.

Immense! My cramp'd horizon grows immense!
Sudden, life stretches out of human sight,
Because I have a glimpse of the great light
Of thy large love; because I have a sense
How true it is, how glowing, how intense,
And how coeval with the Infinite!
Ah! by what intuition, by what might
Of soul, hast thou o'erleapt the triple fence
Of Time, the World, and dreary Circumstance,
That was between us builded up so high,
To blend with me in that diviner trance
Where loving souls become one seeing eye,
Worldless as Seraphs are in the Above,
When they are telling God how much they love?

XXII.

Oh, what is Love that poorly counts the cost ?
I have exchanged my calm for a great storm
In which perhaps I shall be crush'd and lost,
And yet not therefore any wish I form
Again to sink into the autumn frost
And misty dimness of old apathy.
Then, too, the thought that 'tis for thee I'm tost'
Orbs me a region of tranquillity
Amidst the large revolving universe
Which I ensphere within me. There, all pulse
Of passion sleeps; and Joy, that doth coerce
Pangs that life's outer elements convulse,
Rests like the centre of a moving world,
Which sleeps the more the faster it is hurl'd.

XXIII.

'Tis said, blue eyes show more of truth and love
Than dark ones. Can I doubt it? Thine are blue,
Not shallow, but of that deep wondrous hue
The sky has over mountains, when above
The great rocks not a single cloud doth move.
Oh what a liquidness of youthful dew
Is in those eyes of yours! How bright and new
They are, with what a softness of the dove!
In youth 'twas the dark eye attracted me;
I found it false and fickle; therefore more
I trust to the blue eyes for constancy.
And yours, methinks, are rich in mighty store
Of that same wondrous virtue, which is rare
In mortals as in billows, clouds, or air.

XXIV.

A town will be upraised on these sweet banks,
This glen be held within a railway's clutch,
And promenades will cross it in straight ranks,
And, then, men say this vale will prosper much ;
But all these prizes then will be my blanks.
Where will the oaks be ?—where the one-arch'd bridge
That knits together the opposing flanks
Of the abrupt rock and the woody ridge ?
Places to which my soul has given thanks,
Because, sweet love, 'twas there we wander'd free,
And far from the loud wearying world, that clanks
Its fetters, and is proud of slavery.
How will our solitudes be trampled soon !
Yet not so from our hearts shall pass their treasured boon.

XXV.

For your sake I would stand in the world's eye,
In large esteem, that so I may present
Myself to you in full emolument.
With troops of friends my state I would ally ;
Nay, gauds and whirling dance, and revelry,
Things to which once but mocking heed I lent,
I covet now, and mould them to my bent,
Lest I shame you by my lean poverty.
I know you care not for these tricks of show,
Yet I would have them ; deeming that, perchance,
One small reflected ray from them may go
To make me one jot brighter in thy glance :
And, could this be, I swear by these true lines
I'd prize them dearer than Golconda's mines.

XXVI.

Oh how the world—the wicked biting world—
Would come between us! How it doth begin
To pry into our loves, which we had furl'd
So daintily our nested hearts within!
How it doth envy our half-glimpsèd joy,
And whisper lies to pull our fortunes down
As low as its own thoughts, which would destroy
All crownèd things that shame its tinsel crown.
But it shall never dwarf us to its power;
Its instinct is too base for our offence:
If it smell carrion where heaven breathes a flower,
Not ours the fault, but its own poison'd sense.
And we will leave it to that ignorance
Which it mistakes for wisdom's purest glance.

XXVII.

Forgive me, Sweet! My greatest hideous fault
Was not to know indeed how great you were,
How far above poor Custom, whose dull share
Of sense doth never over sensual vault.
What sin it was to deem that you could halt,
Lamed by the low base shows of Earth's repair,
Short of the true bold energies that dare
Seize Truth in face of the whole World's assault!
How could I deem that you knew any law
But that of the high wisdom of the heart?
If you forgive me this vile treacherous flaw
In love, how can I to myself impart
Forgiveness? This enigma hopeless lies,
Unless 'tis read by new light from your eyes.

XXVIII.

Come! Let us laugh at the old worldly modes,
And seek new life in Nature's deathless power!
We'll leave the dust unto the beaten roads,
And in the meadows look upon the flower
Fresh as it ever bloom'd in Eden's bower.
Yes! The night-torch of revels burneth dim,
But bright as childhood is the morning hour.
Disnured man may droop, but blithe birds skim
The air and waters. If we meet the bee,
She will have honey underneath her wing,
No bag of scandal! If the blackbird sing
For us, 'twill be no tale of calumny;
If the brook prattle by, she will not tell
Her neighbours' faults: so shall we prosper well.

XXIX.

Trust thee! Oh, do I trust the flowers and trees,
Or any show of God's great truthfulness?
Are waters true, when they do flow or freeze
As sun or frost their surface doth impress?
The World and you are dear antagonists:
One is all show—the other, without seeming,
Tells what it is, nor falters in the lists
Where heaven's true prize is lost by subtle scheming.
Your ruby mouth is as a bow, whence flies
Only the arrow of immortal truth:
I have but to look straight into your eyes,
And read your deepest secret, which, in sooth,
Is that you love me! This, indeed, you vest
In shades and thickets, as a bird her nest.

XXX.

Men boast that they each other's bosoms read,
Nay, men pretend they understand our love !
I contradict them not: I do not feed
Their pride by zeal their falsehood to disprove.
Still let them guess not how we can rebel
Against weak nature, and be calm, and strong
Death to prefer unto the sensual hell
In which they dream love's loftiness we wrong.
Light, more than darkness, hath its mysteries
To some blear'd eyes ; and if, for one long year,
I wrote our love as crystal sunbeams clear,
The world would pierce no better our disguise
Of gracious joy, that keeps us hid away,
As Gods were, in a cloud e'en at noonday.

XXXI.

And yet without the world we had not met,
Because our lives are tangled in that sphere
Where scarce the yearning heart finds aught that's dear,
Or worthy of a rapture or regret.
Nathless, the tinsel foil in which 'twas set
Made the great jewel of our love appear
More true, more precious ; and our smile and tear
In that parch'd land were more with May-dew wet.
Therefore I will not hate the world, although
I cannot love it. 'Twas our trysting-place,
And something of a beauty and a glow
From us must wander o'er its arid face ;
For we have love that might with its warm breath
Surprise with joy the very depths of death.

XXXII.

If I believe in an Eternity
It is because of Love ! I think how maim'd,
How separated Love is here—how blamed
When it is purest in heaven's radiant eye ;
How dullards chide it, when it soars too high
For their owl's blink of sight. Sages have claim'd
For man immortal life, because his lamed
And prison'd dowers of soul look droopingly
From out their poor clay dwelling, and our knowledge
Is reap'd by hasty death at budding-time :
But 'tis the heart that sends the soul to college
A poor beginner, and whose heaven-sown prime
Demands a future and a harvest, more
Than the academies and all their lore.

XXXIII.

Ah me, how Youth is full of mockery !
Because I am some years in advance of you,
Do not you, sometimes, laugh at my bleach'd hue,
My sunken cheek, and deep-encavern'd eye ;
Or, haply, as afar you pass me by,
Compare me with your full-flush'd retinue
Of youthhood ? But your judgment is untrue.
Not one of all your slaves is young as I,
For they are young through youth, but I through love ;
And I am sure that 'Time hath chill'd me not,
For wise men say advancing years remove
The power to feel, and, when the blood is hot,
Tame it. But I have found no such redress
From Time ; else why this wild disquietness ?

XXXIV.

Sorrow has touch'd me! But her angry dart
Bears not that poison which of old it bore;
The thought of thee hath healing balm in store
To mingle sweets with Fortune's every smart.
Perils from out Life's deep before me start;
But, the tumultuous billows breathing o'er,
Thy Love, like perfumes from a rocky shore,
Gives joy, which from the danger cannot part.
Methinks, to me no former calm did bring
The happiness these troubled hours bestow;
Dearer than joy that needs no comforting
Is thy dear comfort of my daily woe:
So would I rather love thee, and be sad,
Than, wanting thee, have all to make me glad.

XXXV.

Love has a strange perplex'd phenomenon,
Which, from my soul to banish, I will paint,
Then cast it from me. 'Tis a cold constraint
By which, sometimes, two loving hearts are thrown
Into a sudden wide disunion:
They meet, they should be joyous, but they faint
Forlornly, nor have words to breathe their plaint;
For if they had, the wintry spell were gone
That holds them in its wizard vacancy.
Was not that chill upon us yesternight?
We were as two, in scarce-acquainted plight,
And I was thinking, "My love tires of me:
She does not to my bosom creep and nestle!"
And you, perhaps, with some such thought did wrestle.

XXXVI.

To me thy love is a possession true :
Kingdoms and thrones lie outward : this within.
'Tis not like gold, deep-lock'd in miser's bin,
Which hath nor use nor life, nor sheds sweet dew
On any heart. Nor doth it mock the view
Like forms that fancy from the air can win.
Where all these end, it only doth begin :
For, like immortal Nature, ever new
And ever living, this thy love for me
Lies not apart, but mingles with my blood,
Is joy, is health, is true vitality,
The master-spring to every varying mood.
Pay I to thee the homage due to Heaven ?
Nay, God is dearer since thy love was given !

XXXVII.

This passion makes me weak, yet, oh, how strong !
Oh, what extremes in this my love do meet !
By this I throw misfortune at my feet,
Yet tremble at the very dream of wrong,
Which unto thee its shadow might prolong.
Touch but my hand, my heart with joy will beat
Upon the rack, but find in heaven no sweet
Where thou art mingled not its joys among.
'Tis long since any grief my soul could move
Unto the tenderness of childish years ;
Yet, musing all alone upon thy love,
I find that I have wept unconscious tears :
And I am bound as any slave in thee,
Yet kings are fetter'd when compared with me.

XXXVIII.

How often have I thought, before we met,
What store of things I had to say to you,
And pass'd a thousand nothings in review
To be the gems in our bright carcanet
Of future talk. But still I did forget,
When I was with you, all I had foresought
To utter; for an ocean of new thought
Was by your presence into motion set.
And often I could only look upon
Your fair, dear face, and hear your voice unbraid
Its words of beauty, and forget my own;
And I was happy, whatsoe'er we said;
Yet somehow, when you past from me away,
I mourn'd the things I had forgot to say.

XXXIX.

Gone were you, like a meteor of the night.
How fairy-like from me you fled away
With fairy step, how exquisite and light!
And you did melt from me, ere I could say
Farewell, or claim the kiss, my vested right
Of every eve, which, half the time we talk,
I am thinking of, and fearing lest the blight
Of prying eyes my dearest joy should balk:
And, lo, it was yourself did rob my bliss
While I was plotting it, and leading you
Just where the bowery lane most shadowy is,
A spot propitious to our dear adieu.
Did some leaf rustle? Did you feel alarm?
Or was the sudden flight a little wily charm?

XL.

You said we had a fortnight yet to be
Together. It hath dwindled to ten days
Already, and that small eternity
I look'd to, soon will to the backward gaze
Be but a speck of Time. I feel as one
Prison'd of old within that iron room,
Each day made less, each day a window gone,
That dwindled from a chamber to a tomb,
Till it became a death-grasp and a shroud;
So the free space, I live in, fast doth shrink,
Narrowing about me, and the knell is loud
Which tolls my counted minutes to the brink
Of that great wrench from life, which, on the day
We part, death's burden on my soul will lay.

XLI.

As one, who walks along a dizzy steep,
Feels, if he once should scan the precipice,
His step would totter into the abyss,
And so averts his eye from the great deep,
And to the narrow path his gaze doth keep,
So dare I not look on the gulf which is
Before me—the dread hour when I shall miss
Thy presence—so with fixed gaze I creep,
Coasting the edge of that huge yawning time
When we must sever. Till I cross that cleft
I do not listen to the clock's quick chime,
But grasp the precious seconds that are left
Like gold-grains in a hasty river's bed,
That I may yet feel rich before my wealth be fled.

XLI.

In the wild moment when we said farewell,
Whence came a startling gleam of hidden pleasure?
It was that, then, my thoughts were free to measure,
In thy abandonment and bosom's swell,
Thy love, which words had not sufficed to tell,
Which, in bright hours of joy and sparkling leisure,
Lay richly hoarded like a miser's treasure,
Then only drawn from out its secret cell,
When daylight sleeps. What rapture and what pain
Were strangely blended in that parting strife,
And in conflicting union yet remain!
Ay, thus to be beloved is light and life
E'en in that death and darkness of the heart,
Which is true bosoms' portion when they part.

XLII.

We silly creatures, in our parting hour,
Thought only to be happy. Nay, we *were*!
Because each other's presence is the dower
That would snatch flowers from edges of despair.
And we did seem unable utterly
To realise that in some moments more
You would be speeding fast from me, and I
Left lagging on that dull and vacant shore
He stands on who is left behind. Oh, you
Are happier than I, for you have change
And motion, and a prospect of things new
Awaiting you wherever you may range;
But I am left in the old spots of gladness,
So desolate now, to fret myself to madness.

XLIV.

Into this dead-house, for I call it dead
Now you are gone, you did put life and light,
And youthful laughter. Ay, e'en when you fled—
In our glad season—there remain'd a bright
Refraction of your presence, such as, when
The sun sinks, it bequeaths the coming night,
A summer night, so short, that soon again
The clouds catch fire at the recover'd sight
Of their loved God. But winter-nights are long,
And have no dear remembrance of the sun ;
And I am in my winter, whose worst wrong
Is that it came so suddenly, that I
Was dreaming not e'en autumn could be nigh.

XLV.

Is Absence that Pygmalion to thy soul,
It is to mine? Hast thou by it new strife,
Revealings, kindlings, mysteries of life?
When thou wert with me thou didst all control
The blood in me that might too rashly roll :
Thy very kiss was as a prison pure
That did the madness of my thought immure.
Now, as fire legibles a secret scroll
Whose cunning words are only shown by heat,
Thy absence proveth what is writ in me,
And how my heart with wishes wild doth beat :
I dream, I pant, I fuse myself in thee.
Strange, that the immaterial should condense
More than all matter can, the fire of sense !

XLVI.

How tedious is all company to me !
How much the rather would I sit alone,
And only feel my wretched want of thee,
Than thus be interrupted in my moan !
The sole, sad joy of absence is o'erthrown
When my vex'd thought from its great inner deep
Is wrench'd away. Oh, then I am as one
Whom an officious hand disturbs in sleep,
When he lies drinking rest after long toil,
And panteth for the slumber of a year
To wipe away some heavy day's turmoil !
But I, more cursed than he, must strive to grace
My sad upwaking with a smiling face.

XLVII.

The hour, when I should look into my heart,
And find my love for thee no living thing,
But a cold word, were deadlier suffering
Than any known despair or worldly smart ;
Yea, more than if thy love for me could start
From its unswerving course. For to this sting
The thought of my own truth a balm would bring,
And I would build for thee a tomb apart
Within my soul ; and weep for thee as dead,
Loving thee still. But to myself forsworn,
How were I of all life disherited !
Then fear not ! My inconstancy would be
A deeper treachery to myself than thee !

XLVIII.

I know that thou wilt love me to the end,
That thou wilt cling to me though all forsake,
That thou my joy and sorrow wilt partake,
Though every love were far, and every friend:
So on thy faithful love do I depend,
As on a mother the most trusting child,
And never came to me a thought so wild
As that thy upright constancy should bend.
Why is it, then, pale shadows, like to fear,
Feigning thy love may change, dim the excess
Of my great joy? If I read nature clear,
Not thee I dread, but my own happiness,
Which, lest it tempt Fate's envy, I make less,
And cloud it down to suit Earth's cloudy sphere.

XLIX.

Yes, I relieve the fear of o'ermuch joy
By self-wrought sorrow! When Distrust is bare
Of torment to me, I, half trembling, dare
To play at jealousy. But how alloy
My happiness with that? Thou being coy
Even to me? Thus will I weave my care!
I will be jealous of the evening air,
That with thy bosom-kerchief dares to toy,
And chide thy pillow for that thou dost press
Thy cheek to it. Nay, I'll be wroth with thee
For wastry of my vested happiness,
For gazing at the stars too tenderly,
Or giving idle flowers such looks divine
As I am robb'd of, and should be but mine.

L.

Sweet, I forswear at Jealousy to play,
Lest I too fiercely should be whirl'd and caught
In my own rash machinery of thought!
I had begun to question the delay
Of thy return—why I was bid to stay—
Why nothing from thy hand? Was I forgot?
And, if forgot, for whom? Quick let me blot
These treasons out, that burst their sudden way
Into my brain without my heart's consent:
They are too poor to ask forgiveness for!
And now thy letter stills my bosom's war.
Ah! 'twas the want of this dear nutriment
Made me rave idly as the dying do:
Now, coming back to life, I know the false from true.

LL.

Yet, what if thy veil'd eyes, with subtle wile,
Possess an art my judgment to hoodwink?
That thou, being false, dost truth with falsehood link,
And gloss the great perfection of thy guile?
I saw thee once upon another smile:
Nay, I will swear I did! At least I think
That thou of smiling wert upon the brink,
But check'd thyself. Why art thou many a mile
Away from me? Art thou perhaps with him
Who caught that smile, then from amongst us melted?
It must be so! For who of sense so dim,
Who, to chase thee, would not be spurr'd and belted?
Save only I, who by deep vow am bound
Not to encroach upon thy hallow'd ground?

LII.

I have been banish'd by thy own command,
And that's suspicious! Wherefore did I pin
My word to pledged obedience? Wherefore spin,
From dark-webb'd prudence, for myself a band
Strong-knit Love's truer prompting to withstand?
Love owneth absence for its only sin ;
Why hast thou plungèd me so deep therein ?
Nay ! Did I know what sufferings I should brand
Upon myself, when, in a mood too bold,
I said, "'T is better thou should'st be away?"
Now, Pain comes, like a torturer of old,
To wring the truth from me—no grief could lay
Such torment on me as my folly brought
When I submitted to your tyrant thought.

LIII.

If that thou love another, let me know
The worst ; a lingering death I would not die !
Let me not feed on sick uncertainty,
A forced profession, or a courteous show
Of love, that tells how love is mined below ;
Let me not nourish hope by doubt, nor try
The revelation of an alter'd eye !
When sentence is gone out, the quickest blow
Is the most merciful ; a certain hate
Outweighs the joy of an uncertain love ;
And ours was not so weak it should remove,
A wasted thing, through dull oblivion's gate !
Give it a worthy burial ! If thou prove
One thought that wavers, crush me with my fate !

LIV.

Dost thou play with me? O beware, beware!
If of your faith one atom you let slip,
You hurl a stone into a crater's lip
That makes the whole volcano spring in air.
There's danger for you, as upon the stair
Which hung of old before the Virgin's kiss,
Whence the next step was into an abyss;
So, if you leave me, there is no repair
For your dread deed. You have not in me woke
A trim and holiday passion, but such strife
As that fierce gambling where men stake a life
Upon a single cast. And you wreck two,
If you are false, because my destiny is you.

LV.

Ay, you may love another! But it will
Not profit you, nor him! It cannot be
That you should love another one like me,
And I must be your fondest lover still.
For lives the man, whose soul avails to fill
All time, as I do, with one thought of thee?
Grant he hath love, he hath no memory
Of loving hours by forest, lawn, and rill,
Whose silent secret rests with us alone:
Grant he with me in memory could cope,
(A poor surmise!) hath he my vast of hope,
Which grasps a life, leaves it, and rushes on
Past life, past time, past all heaven's wealth of spheres,
To reach the region of uncounted years?

LVI.

Do I, in truth, love thee so over-madly ?
I have been calm to day, and almost wean'd
From thoughts of thee ; so wondrously seren'd
That I, for once, look'd on the heavens gladly :
And, after this, I went not slow and sadly
To think that I had been so light of sense,
So folded in a sweet indifference ;
Remorse made this no crime—at least, not deadly !
But Love is full of infinite surprises—
A player that plays all parts—hath all disguises.
Sudden, I find this mimic apathy
Was but the spring a tiger backward takes
Before a crushing leap he onward makes.
Great Heaven ! How I rush on to love of thee !

LVII.

Thy thought is tuned to mine. That makes the charm
Of very absence. Thou, at this calm hour,
Dost hear my voice ring in thy ear : the power
Of my soul is upon thee : there's a swarm
Of fancies round thee—of affections warm.
The stars are out ! It is a night divine
As any that upon our walks did shine
Of old, when thou wert folded by my arm.
Is not thy dream to have it round thee now,
As mine is, that it were thy waist enringing ?
And that, at intervals, our words did flow
From richest silence and our full hearts springing,
As coy as violets are under their leaves
When Spring about the world her mist of beauty weaves ?

LVIII.

Omens! Oh, all to love is ominous!
A comet hath been glittering in the sky,
Which I have gazed on with a troubled eye;
For these are but unholy stars, and thus,
Ere Love I trusted turn'd ungenerous,
Ay, when I dreamt not any fate was nigh,
A wandering orb gave evil augury;
And I do fear some sorrow threatens us!
And then, of late, my dreams have been too fair,
And dreams are said to go by contraries;
And I have broke a glass, which had been dear
To me from childhood. Taunt me for unwise,
I fail these omens from me to remove,
And doubt they bode some mischief to our love.

LIX.

Oh, how this absence hath a dreary blank,
Where Fear may write her deadly characters!
When Jealousy no more within me stirs,
And feign'd Indifference, like a weak sea-bank,
Lets in a mightier flooding where it sank,
Imagination, strongest when she errs,
Brands in my soul her cruel calendars,
And draws her terrors in a phantom-rank.
Poor friend, dear soul, I then do expiate
All wrongs of thought to thy fidelity.
I paint thee victim to some hideous fate—
Dying perhaps—and I away from thee!
Yes! thou art sick to dying! Were it not so,
How could my love-wise soul such anguish know?

LX.

The morning comes, of health so prodigal,
 I feel that health must on thy being beam;
 And the blue sky absorbs each dreary dream.
 The flowers invite me to a festival,
 To which I deem thee also they do call,
 And happy auguries in the ascendant are.
 Oh, Love is poised upon so light a bar,
 His diamond scales with trifles rise or fall!
 Where are my dismal fears of yesterday?
 Gone . . . aye, already thrown whole ages back
 Into Time's gulf! O thou warm living ray
 Of my existence, how upon thy track
 Could I fling shadows? All things have delight,
 And thou above them all art young and bright.

LXI.

We sat beneath a tree. No summer-day
 Was half so fair as that! A breath of spring
 Still touch'd the earth with tender lingering:
 Our prospect was not large, but meadowy-gay.
 Some distant peasants, turning their sweet hay,
 Did somehow seem to make our communing
 More intimate. Sudden, the blossoming
 Of an Arcadian thought I did obey,
 And carved our cyphers on the beechen rind
 Above us; hiding them in freakish knot:
 Nor were old emblems of pure faith forgot,
 Anchor and Cross, religiously entwined.
 Then did you murmur, in a faltering tone,
 "Will you not oft come here, when I am gone?"

LXII.

Gone! Yes; that time is buried in the Past !
You I may see again, but not the face
Of those same moments, by the self-same grace
Accompanied: for all things alter fast.
Fortune is fickle, e'en though faith should last :
Circumstance creepeth on with alter'd pace,
And Alteration doth with dim hand trace
Records on features where the heart has cast
No deeper change. Though I shall love thee still,
E'en to life's latest gasp, and, though thy hair
Were silver'd, only see the golden there,
Will clocks have struck no onward hours, or will
The air, the sun, the leaves, the green grass be
The same that charm'd us underneath the tree ?

LXIII.

Yet Alteration is but half the truth !
The river passes, but the stream still flows
And fills its channel with eternal youth
Long as shall gush the fountain whence it flows.
Why should I grieve that moments are bereft
Of the same joy their predecessors brought,
While still to me immortally is left
The resurrection of my silent thought ?
Ah yes ! The dim and reverential Past,
Which even beautifies recorded sorrow,
Doth over joy more lasting beauty cast
Than when it bloom'd, yet dreaded the to-morrow.
Quick ! ere I mourn the old evanish'd prime,
Let me unbury that great joyous time !

LXIV.

Which was most full? Our silence or our speech?
Ah, sure our silence! Though we talk'd high things
Of life and death, and of the soul's great wings,
And knowledge pure which only Love can teach;
And we have sat beside the lake's calm beach
Wordless and still, a long and summer day,
As if we only watch'd the insect-play,
Or rippling wave; then simply ask'd of each,
"Shall we not this remember, this sweet time,
Thousands of years hence?" For we felt the while
Those hours must be immortal, and must climb
Before us up to God's undying smile,
Where we should find them one day, and this creed
Was scripture to us, and made full our need.

LXV.

No! no! It never can be natural
We two should be asunder! What are we
Divided? What is any unity
That from itself doth separate and fall?
We are so framèd to be all in all
Unto each other, we must either be
Twin lives, and so encrownèd joyously,
Or something that is pleasure's funeral;
An evening cloud without its sunset-glow,
A mountain-cleft without its summer-stream,
A ravaged garden where no flowers do blow,
A sleep whose comrade is a fever'd dream.
Oh, how like these, when you from me are rent,
I mar my being's full accomplishment!

LXVI.

Our second parting left me for a while
Of thoughts a precious but tumultuous store,
Like that which from our first away I bore.
Thy Love's revealings did to memory smile
So fair, my soul they seem'd to reconcile
Almost to absence; and for evermore,
Methought, such balm into my wounds would pour.
"Love needs not"—so did I my heart beguile—
"To feed his gaze with gross material sight.
I, by his inward eyes, my love behold,
And through the world and troubles manifold
Shall carry with me all my own delight."
Somewhat of this was true. But now I prove
Not in a day we learn the lore of Love.

LXVII.

Of yore, within my heart a spiritual throne
Was built for thee. Not yet thy love was blent
With life's familiar forms of fond content,
And daily communing. Ere these were known,
Of sweet and bitter but the seed was sown
Within my breast. So when from thee I went
I took into the realms of banishment
Of love the happier heritage alone—
His records dear, his faith's tranquillity.
But now I miss thee at accustom'd hours,
And not one lovely show of streams or bowers
But tells me only what is gone from me,
And how I these with willing soul could view
If thou, beloved, didst look upon them too.

LXVIII.

E'en as a mountain-brook, whose feeding snows
Have yielded to the warm perfidious sun,
No more doth in its channel calmly run,
Nor make contented music as it goes,
But ever more and more perturbèd flows
As summer had its winter but begun :
E'en so for me life's calmer day is done,
Since Love more beaming melted my repose.
So did my thoughts, of yore a gentle stream,
Wander through absence with a soft delay,
Dallying with birds and flowers and many a gleam
Of tender light. Now, changed as in a dream,
They in impetuous torrents bound away
Towards thee, their ocean, without check or stay.

LXIX.

Oh, they are wrong who banish Hope from Hell !
Long as the soul her nature shall retain,
A strong bold courage shall help mortals well
To wrestle with substantial forms of pain :
But to endure, to suffer, and to wait,
To sit and droop in mute expectancy—
This is a hell no fancy need create,
For I am in that hell while waiting thee.
And I have thought—when suddenly I clasp
My arms upon my breast, as if I there
Thee in their fond entanglement could grasp,
But find them only close on empty air—
If to recall thee all things else were slack,
The aching of my heart would bring thee back.

LXX.

How would these passions melt away in rest
Thou being near me! There alone the cure
Of all that my great struggling thoughts endure,
And shut within the silence of my breast.
As when a ship, which adverse winds molest,
Should it put back to seek its haven sure,
Sweeps round with glad and graceful curvature,
And, in the moment it obeys the hest
Of the imperious gale, finds welcome ease,
No more doth labour on with stress and strain,
But lightly glides along the yielding seas;
So is my way from thee a weary pain,
But for my spirit what repose would be
E'en in the shaping of my course towards thee!

LOVE VERSES.

1

2

3

I.

THE INCONSTANT CONSTANT.

I HAVE loved many. Am I then
A mere inconstant amongst men?
Inconstant? No! My heart doth move
Still on one pole:
Fix'd is the worship of my soul.
My own true Love, throughout the weary world
I sought, but found not; so did ever rove
Where I, by shadows, was perversely hurl'd
From grasping Hope's substantial treasure-trove.
But, through all fleeting forms,
And passion-storms,
Alice, in real deed, my only Love
Thou art, and wert. First, as a dream of youth,
Passing through many a phase of fantasy
And cheatery of the eye,
Then, as thyself, a warm and living truth.

II.

FORE-KNOWLEDGE.

BEFORE I met thee, O my love,
In dreams I felt thy kiss
Upon my lips ! and I did prove
An antedated bliss.

When first into the room you came
Appearing to mine eyes,
I knew a vision, long the same,
And did not feel surprise.

As every look of thine did dawn,
I did not thrill or start ;
It was but as a veil withdrawn
From something in my heart.

Methought a well-known tender call
In you my soul could trace ;
It seem'd to me so natural
One day to see your face.

And, when your voice upon my ear
Its first sweet spell had thrown,
'Twas not the music was so dear
As the familiar tone.

Whate'er was said, whate'er was done
In that first meeting's store,
With the heart's prophecy was one;
I knew it all before !

Part of my life you seem'd to be
In an eternal scope :
A hope accomplish'd beam'd in thee
I had not known was hope.

Calmly my spirit seem'd to melt,
And seal thee for its own ;
Others were present ; but I felt
As if we were alone !

And the same mystery, you say,
To me your heart did move ;
Then can we doubt that both, that day,
Began an endless love ?

III.

PARTING.

WHEN kindred soul with soul hath met,
How Memory loves the precious boon,
And yet we feel a fond regret
To think those hours were fled so soon.

The livelong eve in converse bright
Had thought's electric flashes play'd,
Yet, when the hour has taken flight,
We grieve so much was left unsaid.

And, sometimes, when glad moments flee,
There comes a fancy o'er the brain,
'Twere better meetings should not be
If partings always give such pain.

IV.

A DISCOVERY.

METHOUGHT it was the air and sun
That made me feel so blest,
And when I look'd into the West,
I said "How sweetly doth the day down run!"
I had forgot that one was by
Who gave that glow to earth and sky.

Methought it was the laughing throng
Of children and their play
Which made the house appear so gay,
And sound so glad with echoing song:
I had forgot one voice so clear
Which also used to mingle there.

We sought the sea. O happy time!
Methought my bosom swell'd
With joy that I again beheld
The long-unseen great ocean-field sublime;
I had forgot I gazed on too
An eye more bright than ocean's blue.

That air, that sun, that ocean field,
That house with children gay,
I seek again. Ah well-away!
I find that they not any joy can yield.
For one is gone: and now I know
What made all things to smile and glow.

V.

REASONABLE WISHES.

I wish thee happy:—yet indeed,
Such is Love's selfishness,
I wish that none but I succeed
With joy thy heart to bless.

I wish thee glad, where'er thou go,
And yet—in every spot—
I wish that thou a want may'st know
To tell where I am not.

To thee may Life its treasures give,
Yet thine the feeling be—
That only thou begann'st to live
When thou hadst look'd on me!

VI.

ALICE AT THE BALL.

BUT yester-eve we seem'd as one
In thought and quiet dream,
And both our lives might seem to run
In the same tranquil stream.

How different is our lot to-night !
In separate spheres we dwell :
You in a scene of revel bright,
I in my silent cell.

And such is life ! We meet, we part,
Each goes a different way ;
One with a sad and anxious heart,
Another, light and gay.

Yet would I not my thought's calm dower
Exchange at Pleasure's shrine :
Thy memory fills this silent hour ;
Hast thou such joy as mine ?

VII.

QUESTIONS.

TELL me, when we do not meet
From the morn till even-shine,
Shoots a pang, with impulse fleet,
From my bosom into thine?

Say, when comes the accustom'd hour
For the walk by grove or lea,
Is there an absorbing power
Which would draw thy feet to me?

When the twilight shades are round
Nature, in thy distant home,
Does my voice about thee sound,
Ever gently murmuring, "Come?"

Hast thou still an eager sense
All thy wealth of love to cast,
As my bosom's recompense
For its sad deceptions past?

If so, our two lives may run
Forward, with a fervent stream,
Still incorporate in one
When Death itself shall be a dream.

VIII.

TO ALICE.

YES! Thou hast robb'd me of my rest,
But I shall deem my loss is gain
So long as I within my breast
Thy love in full exchange retain.

But, oh, how bankrupt were my store,
If once thy love from me were fled,
If you, who steal my peace, no more
Should give me happiness instead!

IX.

RETROSPECT.

LONELY is the room :
Every wind is still as death ;
E'en the fire doth hold its breath :
Only the ticking clock
Doth the ear of Silence mock.
Burn the lights as in a tomb
In the lonely room.

Now again 'tis eve:
Change of sadness comes to me;
Moan the winds o'er lake and lea :
Like sad voices round
The forsaken house they sound :
Ghostly forms gaunt shadows weave :
Mournful is the eve.

Once more flies the day :
'Tis, methinks, a happy night :
Ruddy glows the fire, and bright.
On the pictured walls
Soft and shadowy radiance falls :
Everything looks calm and gay : —
Thou wert here to-day !

X.

I WRITE no verses unto thee
When thou art at my side,
Because thou art my poesy,
Nor need I to provide
A double harmony.

But, when thou art away, I sing
Like any mateless bird
That cannot find its love in spring ;
Thus I, by passion stirr'd,
Ease my heart's fluttering.

XI.

SHORT, BUT LONG.

You say that but six little weeks
We have each other known ;
And that the time is very short,
And hath so quickly flown :

But then, when first we met, you know,
We both within us felt
The dreams of many hundred years
Into our memory melt.

No loves of old familiar days
Could so familiar be
As I to you (you've told me so),
And you, my love, to me.

And the six weeks that have elapsed
Since first you met my ken,
Count time by feelings, not by hours,
What will their length be then ?

And just reflect how much for us
Those six short weeks have done ; —
They've stamp'd the colour of our lives,
They've made two beings one.


More thoughts have trembled through our brains,
And swept our bosoms o'er,
In that short time ; and more we've lived
Than in our lives before.

'Tis true I cannot talk with thee
Of home and early ties,
Of friends in childhood known to both,
Or mutual memories ;

Yet every careless word we say
Out of some depth doth grow ;
Our spirits can look back to times
More long than " Long ago."

And childhood is a recent thing
To what our hearts recall ;
I do not ask, " Why wert thou not
Bred in my father's hall ?"

Nor am I vex'd we have no stores
To earthly memory due ;
We cannot mutual joys revive,
But then no sorrows too.



And thy fresh youth of maiden joy
Doth me with bliss surround:
I've cultivated thorns too long,
And sown a barren ground.

Kindred are oft but kin by name,
Our thoughts they never knew;
An hour of sympathy is worth
An age of love untrue.

And which claims most? The tie that spans,
Or that which makes a gulf?
And which is oldest? Love that counts
By eras, or itself?

An orb, a circle, is our love;
Its ocean hath no shore;
It hath Eternity behind,
Eternity before.

E'en if we grant what greybeards say,
And own our love is new;
New things, at least, have freshest bloom,
And sparkle most with dew.


New is our love? Why, so are flowers—
The light—the vernal sod—
New as to-day, and yet as old
As the eternal God!

A thousand outworn things will die,
Yet this be newly sprung;
Things insincere alone are old,
True hearts are always young.

If still our Love demands some charm,
Some grace Time only lends,
Its newness is at least a fault
Which every moment mends.

XII.

EACH day didst thou with undesignèd art
Enter within a new fold of my heart,
And take possession with a force so free
That now my being is one pulse of thee.
When absent or when present to my sight,
'Tis you who make within me day or night,
And Earth for me has but two regions got—
One where thou art, and one where thou art not.
Strange contradictions in my bosom fit;
I've halved existence, yet I've doubled it:
Emptied of self, I come no void across,
And all my gain is centred in my loss.



XIII.

I AM beloved; and Life again is dear!
I see the Morning in her robe of grey
Faint smiling o'er the distant heights appear,
And do not from her sweet light turn away:
I am beloved!

I am beloved; and Hope has look'd on me!
For me the noontide is no more too bright:
I share the joy of earth, and air, and sea,
Nor is the day too long for my delight:
I am beloved!

I am beloved! The gentlest summer-moon
No longer mocks me with her quiet beams:
Forgetfulness was once the dearest boon
That sleep could bring. But now I ask for dreams.
I am beloved!

XIV.

I CARE for nothing, while thy love
 For me doth in thee thrill,
 And, if thy heart from me remove,
 I care for nothing still.

In seeming balance are descried
 Love living or destroy'd:
 But, oh, what, aching worlds divide
 The fulness and the void!

XV.

THE REASON WHY.

THINK not, my love, I riot on thy cheek
Because it is the softest ever prest;
That I thy white hand's thrilling pressure seek
Because it 'minds me of the cygnet's nest :
Oh no ! oh no ! It is because I love thee !

Think not the Paradise of those red lips
Lures me with transport of material joy ;
That, if my brain faints in a dim eclipse
When I dare touch them, this is Earth's alloy :
Oh no ! oh no ! It is because I love thee !

Think not the balmy breath that's breathed by thee
Pervades my being with unmeasured bliss
Because thou hast, with innocent felony,
Robb'd the young May of Zephyr's sweetest kiss :
Oh no ! oh no ! It is because I love thee !

O dearest, fairest !— Is it then thy mind,
Though to thy beauty 'tis so true a mate,
That doth about me such strong fetters wind ;
Do I thy worth so nicely calculate ?
Oh no ! I nothing know but that I love thee !

XVI.


THE WORST ABSENCE.

ABSENCE, to paint thy pangs we pour
Full many a mournful lay :
But I will tell thee of a store
Of griefs more keen than they.

It is the *presence*, in a crowd,
Of the belovèd one,
When links, that bound what hearts had vow'd,
Seem loosen'd and undone.

When eyes, that with a loving beam
For us alone have burn'd,
Coldly from us averted seem,
Or bright on others turn'd.

When laughter rings, and mirth goes round,
And we must play a part,
And echo every hollow sound
That only mocks the heart.



O then, nor gulfs, nor oceans wide,
Nor pestilence, nor doom
Us from our treasure can divide,
So much as that one room!

XVII.

I **HATE** the world, whose feverish strife
Sometimes entangleth thee;
And hate it still the more, because
It steals thy looks from me.

Then, Alice, from this treacherous foe
Let us yet timely flee,
Lest it not only steal thine eyes,
But rob thy heart from me.


XVIII.

WHEN thou art gone, wilt thou regret
No more to view my face,
And feel that thou canst never let
Another fill my place?

Though laugh and song be round thee thrown,
And friends encircle thee,
Wilt thou still find thyself alone
If once deprived of me?

Wilt thou, though girlish fancy draws
The world with aspect fair,
Choose rather solitude—because
My thought most meets thee there?

Or will thy spirit, lightly bruised,
Too soon my loss restore,
And feel that if thou art amused
Thou needest me no more?



At evening's sacred hour serene,
When now so oft we meet,
Say, wouldst thou seek some other scene
With step as light and fleet?

Oh, how these questions thrill my breast
As "Yes" or "No" prevails;
Methinks my very life of life
Is trembling in the scales!

XIX.

WHEN a depth of love
In the heart doth move,
Sweeter 'tis to say
To-morrow than to-day:
Yet I am not loth
To say, "To-day and to-morrow both!"

XX.

THE day is shining bright,
All things have life and cheer,
Yet I have no delight,
Nature looks dark and drear,
Because thou art not here.

In vain the flowers are gay,
In vain the birds sing clear,
Nothing has bloom to-day,
Nothing can charm my ear,
Because thou art not here.

Naught with my wish agrees
Unless when thou art near;
But winter blasts would please,
And gloomy mists be dear,
If only thou wert here!

XXI.

THE HILL.

To the hill, to the hill,
I am ever looking still;
For sometimes, there stepping fleet,
Glance my maiden's little feet.

Now I hope those small feet will
Soon come tripping down the hill.
Is it so? Ah, hope deceives!
'Twas the twinkling of the leaves!

Now, my beating heart, be still!
Some one hastens down the hill—
Other steps my hopes betray:
Ah, we shall not meet to-day!

What could so my fancy fill
That I dreamt thee on the hill?
As if other form could shine
With a shadowy grace like thine!

Who but thou with joy can fill
That bright pathway on the hill?
Though that hill my peace doth take,
How I love it for thy sake!

Even when we do not meet,
There I would behold thee, Sweet!
For, when thou hast past the hill,
With my heart I see thee still.

XXII.

I do not grieve that I have given
My very soul to thee,
But that to give it thee again
Is now denied to me.

XXIII.

I WANT you! I want you! and that is all my song!
I want you! I want you! the time it is so long!
I want you! I want you! what matters it to me
How rich I am in other things, if I am robb'd of thee?

The wise no doubt are very wise; but oh they tire me so!
Since you have taught my heart to love, it does not care to know.
The witty may make others laugh, but fail to make me gay;
I'd rather look at you than hear the best that they can say.

I want you! I want you! The day is very fair,
And thousand things of light and life are in the earth and air;
But still my heart, incapable to share the glad delight,
Says nothing but "I want you!" from morning until night.

I want you! I want you! In vain men cry to me—
How fair our shining crowds and our nightly revels be!
I'd rather sit alone, if thou art from me torn,
Repeating but "I want you!" from evening until morn.

XXIV.

BREATHE no vows—oh, breathe no vows,
To love me ever !
None, none have deeply sworn to me
They would love me utterly,
But Falsehood came, or Destiny,
Our Fates to sever !

Give me not—oh, give me not
One of those shining
Ringlets of thine ! . . . Ah me, I know
'Tis ominous when maids bestow
Locks of their hair, and doth foreshow
Love's disentwining !

Give no ring—oh, give no ring
For our love-token !
Such golden circlets, men allege,
Are of eternity a pledge ;—
Alas, I've found them on the edge
Of Faith soon broken !

Rather give — oh, rather give
To me the blossom
Of thy rich thought, when I am not
Beside thee, but in some far spot
Wander, by all the world forgot,
Shrined in thy bosom.

Or one look — oh, one fond look,
Meant for me only,
When lighted halls, and mirth and song
Send back our hearts, amidst the throng,
More to each other to belong,
And but more lonely.

Dearer yet — oh, dearer yet,
Some word low-springing
Up from thy lips, when twilight is
Upon the silent world — the bliss
Of thy hands' pressure — ah, a kiss
Long, long, and clinging!

XXV.

I HEARD the nightingale so sadly
Singing on a thorn above,
Ah, I said, how thou art grieving !
No ! sigh'd she—I love ! I love !

Her the stock-dove now was joining,
By sad notes the soul to move :
Ah, I said, how thou art pining !
No ! wail'd she—I love ! I love !

So it is with me ; you see me
Rage, and weep, and anguish prove ;
Ah, you say, how much you suffer !
No, indeed !—I love ! I love !

XXVI.

SUMMER's over—Summer's past !
Other Summers shall return,
But that Summer shall recast
Itself no more from out the urn
Of thrifty Time. O never more !
Waves revisit not the shore !
Summer's o'er !

Fair it was, oh heavenly fair !
Sunshine had it, song of birds,
Morning stillness, evening air,
And, more than all, fond human words !
The birds again their song shall pour ;
But those words shall come no more !
Summer's o'er !

XXVII.

“ Good bye ! ” What is it ? “ God be with you ! ”
Wherefore, then, bedew the eye
With such heavy drops of sorrow
When we lingering say, “ Good bye ? ”
Oh, it is the word of parting,
Therefore comes the bitter smarting !

XXVIII.


ALICE GONE.

WAS I not all yesternight
Murmuring to thee many things,
Memories of our past delight,
Happy hours from purest springs?

Did not a most yearning air
Pale with sorrow, pale and dim,
In the night we parted were,
Faintly round thy pillow swim?

All the night, till morning prime,
Hadst thou not a sense of moan—
Voices saying, “Ah the time,
Ah the pleasant time is flown!”

“Other joys may meet our touch”—
So the meaning voices said—
“But the days we loved so much
Are for ever—ever fled!”



Then, at morn, methinks the moan
Parted with the parting gloom,
And a softer, happier tone
Breathed around thy quiet room.

Yes! for then a comfort stole
On myself, and whisper'd me ;
“ All Love's joys within the soul
Live and breathe eternally ! ”

XXIX.

BREAKING OFF.

IF thou wert dead, it might be sweet
The tear for thee to pour :
But there's no cure for this distress ;
We live—yet meet no more !

And Memory that loves the tomb
Is now but jealous pain ;
Yet still to banish Memory
My very will is vain.

For, from thy dead love, on my path
Shines down an after-glow,
Like light from stars that have gone out
A thousand years ago.

And thou art free ; but I am bound,
And bind myself anew.
I know that thou wert false. What then ?
My heart shall still be true !

Forgive thee? Yes! nay more, I ask
From thee no fond regret.
While others say, "Remember me!"
I only say, "Forget!"

XXX.

ATTEMPTED INCONSTANCY.

PAST, I don't want you! Future, you bore me!
Oh, thou Present, thou ever-dear Present,
Thou alone shalt shed happiness o'er me!
Look at me—only take care to look pleasant!

And, to make sure of thee, fair and beguiling,
This is the form in which thee I subpoena;
Come to me beautiful, come to me smiling,—
Come to me, as my own exquisite Nina!

XXXI.

SUPPOSED TO BE ALL OVER.

'Tis over: and we meet no more !
And yet in wrath we did not part :
One spasm, and the whole was o'er
Of that great story of the heart.

We never bandied words of ire,
There was no lessening of our love ;
Our large emotions did not tire,
Our joy to meet did not remove ;

Of one least look we did not pall,
Of fire no spark had left the eye,
And yet there is an end of all,
And, stranger still, we know not why !

And both still love, and with warm thrills
On passion's memory fondly hang,
And each is sure the other feels
So to have loved was worth the pang.

To every feeling life can know,
To that wild wondrous tempest-sweep
Fit end, in its dark sullen glow,
Is this lorn silence, full and deep !

XXXII.

TO ALICE.

THE child in its exulting walk,
Brimful of life and joy,
Will pluck the wild-flower from its stalk,
And use it for a toy.

Awhile he loves its colours gay,
Its scent and beauty rare,
Then throws it on the public way,
To die neglected there.

So, Alice, didst thou take my heart,
Then throw it heedless by,
An outcast on the world's rude mart,
To wither and to die.

XXXIII.

COMPUNCTION.

I BEAR in my breast the arrow,
 I shall carry it afar;
 The wide world is too narrow
 For the flight of my wild life-star.

I am deeply hit; as in battle,
 When a man has his death-wound,
 He smiles at the cannon's loud rattle,
 So I quietly fall to the ground.

And to me the same are all places,
 All persons. Alas my pain!
 For the one my spirit chases
 I shall never come up with again.

XXXIV.

CLEARING UP.

My love for thee began in sorrow,
And with a kind of trembling fear :
I ask'd, What will it be to-morrow,
If to-day it shed a tear ?
Is not this cloud, which hangs so near
Upon the eyelids of Love's morning,
A brooding terror, a forewarning
Of a long day, dark and drear ?

Thunder-clouds shed passion-drops :
So our souls, those lurid skies,
Made a stormy revelation
Out of our enclouded eyes.
Now our speech, cut short by sighs,
Came forth in gloomy parables,
Half-dumb mutter'd oracles,
Children of our jealousies.

Ah, thank God, this now is over !
There is a clearing and a lull,
From out of which I can discover
The steadfast and the beautiful.
Yet this calm, it is not dull,
But has something like the bridal
Heaving of the ocean tidal
About some large ship's anchor'd hull.

XXXV.

THE HOUR.

Six o'clock ! It speaks of thee !
'Tis the hour I used to come
In the twilight stealthily
To the shadows of thy home.

Six o'clock ! It speaks to me
More than meeteth mortal sense :
Six o'clock ! Eternity
Henceforth must be dated thence !

XXXVI.

RECONCILIATION.

NEAR thee I was too impassion'd,
Too upheaved myself above,
Scarce I knew what I was feeling—
Absence hath reveal'd my love.

At thy side I had a trouble
Which too near to pain did move:
I ask'd, sometimes, in thy presence,
“Can this misery be love?”

Is it form'd to be eternal?
Should it not be as the dove,
Brooding calmly o'er her treasure?
Are such storms the birth of love?

Shaken like a leaf before thee,
Crowded thoughts in stormy drove
Scarce perceived thy real merits;
Absence hath reveal'd my love!

Love, true, tender, heaven-aspiring,—
 No vain meteor, born to rove!
 On thy image calmly feeding
 Now I know how much I love.

XXXVII.

MEETING AGAIN.

Go quick—go quick—go quick,
 Oh Time, Oh Time, Oh Time!
 Because I am to meet
 My love at vesper chime.
 But, ah, thou hearèst not!

Go slow—go slow—go slow,
 Oh Time, Oh Time, Oh Time!
 Because I am to quit
 My love at midnight chime.
 But, ah, thou hearèst not!

XXXVIII.

HAPPY.

Rest thee! Rest thee! There is peace
And beauty all around;
And the lake doth ever make
A low and loving sound.

Rest thee! Rest thee! Shadows fall
Rich with an evening hue;
And the mist hath softly kiss'd
The waves and mountains too.

Rest thee! Rest thee! Homeward veers
The white sail to its rest:
Thou, too, come! Thou know'st thy home!
Here—here upon my breast!

XXXIX.

MARRIED TO ALICE.

Oh, the joy to walk with thee,
 Where once alone I stray'd,
 Through all the love and poesy
 Wherewith the world's array'd!

Oh, the joy to talk with thee
 Of things I name to none,
 Of feelings I were never free
 To tell another one!

Oh, the joy to read with thee,
 Out of the self-same page,
 The glowing thoughts writ happily
 By masters of the age.

Oh, the joy to feel with thee
 That spring is in the air!
 That God, and life, and liberty
 For me are everywhere!

Oh, the joy to sit by thee,
To look into thine eyes;
And drink thy being utterly,
Till mine grows dim and dies !

THE THIRD GATE.

THE LAW OF LOVE.

*" You say, Sir Andrew with his love of law ;
And I, the Saviour with his law of love."*


Hood.



THE LAW OF LOVE.

THROUGH the great Gate of anxious questioning,
That spans the problem of Man's troubled life ;
Through the solution of sweet human Love,
Which doth undo the bars of thought by Joy—
For he who's happy questioneth no more—
We come as pilgrims to the Law of Love,
Which whoso enters not with willing soul
May *say* he has Religion—name I give not,
Because 'tis palter'd so, to my third Gate—
But is, in truth, as ignorant of Christ
As is the Indian Fetish-worshipper.
And yet how few of those who *call themselves*
(Oh, happy irony of our good Prayer-book !)
Christians, have knowledge of the Law of Christ !
Professions of the world are clean against
Its loving sway. The Lawyer hath it not,
For he would kick, and utterly refuse
To be done by as he does, and mesh'd in pleas,
Or smother'd in a suit of Chancery.

The Statesman, great at patching protocols,
Dressing up envoys, laying a sly paw
On some choice morsel of disputed Europe,
Is a mere bungler at the Law of Christ.
The Priest, who preaches Hell, is very far
From His dear Law who came to save us all :
And, if his flock, who love the pastor more
The more he damns them, fee his chapel well,
What careth he, whom threatenings keep so fat,
How fares the Law of Love? As to the Soldier,
I do not measure him by what he does
Under command ; and, haply, he's a Christian
More than the Parson who doth bless the banner
That flaunts to battle, and who stirs such strife
In his own small parochial water-drop : —
Ah, certainly, a thousand times more Christian
Than the great monarch — of that hornèd breed
Named in the Revelation and kept up
To present times by breeding in and in ; —
Ay, than the Christian monarch who doth arm him —
Him, the unreasoning obedient soldier —
For royal, right-down, Christian butchery.
Besides, the Soldier, on the battle-field,
Often does deeds of love, that are not writ
In the despatches Pondering these things
I struck out some new meanings from old texts,
Which, if they reach thy soul as they did mine,
Will need no piecing out of chapter and verse,
Reader, to guide thee to the Law of Love.



And, once within the gates, and circled round
By Sorrow, Love, and Christ's dear loving Law,
The spirit will have leisure to be calm,
And to choose many a free meandering path
In the protected region she hath gain'd
By courage for herself. Then will she stray
Through Nature's forest-ground, and visit plains,
And trees, and flowers, and lakes that fill the urns
Of the great mountains with their liquid joy ;
Or lawns, high up amidst the lonely hills,
Unmown except by sheep, and smoother, finer,
Than those which weeding-hooks and gardeners' rollers
Constrain to velvet for the rich man's eye.
And sometimes too the soul, in her domain
Of liberty, will find sweet bye-paths lead
To the deep fountains of humanity,
And vistas that let in the world of thought
Beyond the shelter of the prospect-shades.

THE CASKET—IN TWO PARTS.

PART THE FIRST.

1.

AGES ago when, through mists of doubt,
Mortals for God were looking out,
Suddenly a great cloud was riven,
And a wonderful Casket fell down from heaven.

2.

Rich was the Casket ; no gold so rare
With the metal whereof it was wrought could compare ;
Its jewels all jewels of Earth did obscure,
But the workmanship made the materials poor.

3.

For all the marvels of Creation
Were graved upon it to admiration ;
Nothing that land or sky enfold
But on the Casket you might behold.

4.

There was the form, and there was the hue.
The flowers shone forth as if wet with dew ;
The rose was red, and the grass was green,
And the rivers were silver-bright between.

5.

And, by mystic art, the form and the hue
Had the beauty of motion too ;
And form, and hue, and motion were crown'd
With the mightiness of the world of sound.

6.


The forests rustled — the forests sigh'd —
Birds sang in the boughs where they did hide ;
And from the air came low or loud
The hush and the thunder of billow and cloud.

7.

But form, and colour, and moving strife,
And the sounding wheels of outer life
To the inner meanings such measure bore
As a grain of sand to the whole sea-shore.

8.

For the Casket to your soul did send
Man's history from beginning to end,
And, in its greatness, did declare
Things that before the beginning were.



XXII.

Oh, what is Love that poorly counts the cost?
I have exchanged my calm for a great storm
In which perhaps I shall be crush'd and lost,
And yet not therefore any wish I form
Again to sink into the autumn frost
And misty dimness of old apathy.
Then, too, the thought that 'tis for thee I'm tost
Orbs me a region of tranquillity
Amidst the large revolving universe
Which I ensphere within me. There, all pulse
Of passion sleeps; and Joy, that doth coerce
Pangs that life's outer elements convulse,
Rests like the centre of a moving world,
Which sleeps the more the faster it is hurl'd.

XXIII.

'Tis said, blue eyes show more of truth and love
Than dark ones. Can I doubt it? Thine are blue,
Not shallow, but of that deep wondrous hue
The sky has over mountains, when above
The great rocks not a single cloud doth move.
Oh what a liquidness of youthful dew
Is in those eyes of yours! How bright and new
They are, with what a softness of the dove!
In youth 'twas the dark eye attracted me;
I found it false and fickle; therefore more
I trust to the blue eyes for constancy.
And yours, methinks, are rich in mighty store
Of that same wondrous virtue, which is rare
In mortals as in billows, clouds, or air.

XXIV.

A town will be upraised on these sweet banks,
This glen be held within a railway's clutch,
And promenades will cross it in straight ranks,
And, then, men say this vale will prosper much ;
But all these prizes then will be my blanks.
Where will the oaks be ?—where the one-arch'd bridge
That knits together the opposing flanks
Of the abrupt rock and the woody ridge ?
Places to which my soul has given thanks,
Because, sweet love, 'twas there we wander'd free,
And far from the loud wearying world, that clanks
Its fetters, and is proud of slavery.
How will our solitudes be trampled soon !
Yet not so from our hearts shall pass their treasured boon.

XXV.

For your sake I would stand in the world's eye,
In large esteem, that so I may present
Myself to you in full emolument.
With troops of friends my state I would ally ;
Nay, gauds and whirling dance, and revelry,
Things to which once but mocking heed I lent,
I covet now, and mould them to my bent,
Lest I shame you by my lean poverty.
I know you care not for these tricks of show,
Yet I would have them ; deeming that, perchance,
One small reflected ray from them may go
To make me one jot brighter in thy glance :
And, could this be, I swear by these true lines
I'd prize them dearer than Golconda's mines.

XXVI.

Oh how the world—the wicked biting world—
Would come between us ! How it doth begin
To pry into our loves, which we had furl'd
So daintily our nested hearts within !
How it doth envy our half-glimpsèd joy,
And whisper lies to pull our fortunes down
As low as its own thoughts, which would destroy
All crownèd things that shame its tinsel crown.
But it shall never dwarf us to its power ;
Its instinct is too base for our offence :
If it smell carrion where heaven breathes a flower,
Not ours the fault, but its own poison'd sense.
And we will leave it to that ignorance
Which it mistakes for wisdom's purest glance.

XXVII.

Forgive me, Sweet ! My greatest hideous fault
Was not to know indeed how great you were,
How far above poor Custom, whose dull share
Of sense doth never over sensual vault.
What sin it was to deem that you could halt,
Lamed by the low base shows of Earth's repair,
Short of the true bold energies that dare
Seize Truth in face of the whole World's assault !
How could I deem that you knew any law
But that of the high wisdom of the heart ?
If you forgive me this vile treacherous flaw
In love, how can I to myself impart
Forgiveness ? This enigma hopeless lies,
Unless 'tis read by new light from your eyes.

XXVIII.

Come! Let us laugh at the old worldly modes,
And seek new life in Nature's deathless power!
We'll leave the dust unto the beaten roads,
And in the meadows look upon the flower
Fresh as it ever bloom'd in Eden's bower.
Yes! The night-torch of revels burneth dim,
But bright as childhood is the morning hour.
Disnured man may droop, but blithe birds skim
The air and waters. If we meet the bee,
She will have honey underneath her wing,
No bag of scandal! If the blackbird sing
For us, 'twill be no tale of calumny;
If the brook prattle by, she will not tell
Her neighbours' faults: so shall we prosper well.

XXIX.

Trust thee! Oh, do I trust the flowers and trees,
Or any show of God's great truthfulness?
Are waters true, when they do flow or freeze
As sun or frost their surface doth impress?
The World and you are dear antagonists:
One is all show—the other, without seeming,
Tells what it is, nor falters in the lists
Where heaven's true prize is lost by subtle scheming.
Your ruby mouth is as a bow, whence flies
Only the arrow of immortal truth:
I have but to look straight into your eyes,
And read your deepest secret, which, in sooth,
Is that you love me! This, indeed, you vest
In shades and thickets, as a bird her nest.

XXX.

Men boast that they each other's bosoms read,
Nay, men pretend they understand our love !
I contradict them not: I do not feed
Their pride by zeal their falsehood to disprove.
Still let them guess not how we can rebel
Against weak nature, and be calm, and strong
Death to prefer unto the sensual hell
In which they dream love's loftiness we wrong.
Light, more than darkness, hath its mysteries
To some blear'd eyes; and if, for one long year,
I wrote our love as crystal sunbeams clear,
The world would pierce no better our disguise
Of gracious joy, that keeps us hid away,
As Gods were, in a cloud e'en at noonday.

XXXI.

And yet without the world we had not met,
Because our lives are tangled in that sphere
Where scarce the yearning heart finds aught that's dear,
Or worthy of a rapture or regret.
Nathless, the tinsel foil in which 'twas set
Made the great jewel of our love appear
More true, more precious; and our smile and tear
In that parch'd land were more with May-dew wet.
Therefore I will not hate the world, although
I cannot love it. 'Twas our trysting-place,
And something of a beauty and a glow
From us must wander o'er its arid face;
For we have love that might with its warm breath
Surprise with joy the very depths of death.

XXXII.

If I believe in an Eternity
It is because of Love ! I think how maim'd,
How separated Love is here—how blamed
When it is purest in heaven's radiant eye ;
How dullards chide it, when it soars too high
For their owl's blink of sight. Sages have claim'd
For man immortal life, because his lamed
And prison'd dowers of soul look droopingly
From out their poor clay dwelling, and our knowledge
Is reap'd by hasty death at budding-time :
But 'tis the heart that sends the soul to college
A poor beginner, and whose heaven-sown prime
Demands a future and a harvest, more
Than the academies and all their lore.

XXXIII.

Ah me, how Youth is full of mockery !
Because I am some years in advance of you,
Do not you, sometimes, laugh at my bleach'd hue,
My sunken cheek, and deep-encavern'd eye ;
Or, haply, as afar you pass me by,
Compare me with your full-flush'd retinue
Of youthhood ? But your judgment is untrue.
Not one of all your slaves is young as I,
For they are young through youth, but I through love ;
And I am sure that 'Time hath chill'd me not,
For wise men say advancing years remove
The power to feel, and, when the blood is hot,
Tame it. But I have found no such redress
From Time ; else why this wild disquietness ?

XXXIV.

Sorrow has touch'd me! But her angry dart
Bears not that poison which of old it bore;
The thought of thee hath healing balm in store
To mingle sweets with Fortune's every smart.
Perils from out Life's deep before me start;
But, the tumultuous billows breathing o'er,
Thy Love, like perfumes from a rocky shore,
Gives joy, which from the danger cannot part.
Methinks, to me no former calm did bring
The happiness these troubled hours bestow;
Dearer than joy that needs no comforting
Is thy dear comfort of my daily woe:
So would I rather love thee, and be sad,
Than, wanting thee, have all to make me glad.

XXXV.


Love has a strange perplex'd phenomenon,
Which, from my soul to banish, I will paint,
Then cast it from me. 'Tis a cold constraint
By which, sometimes, two loving hearts are thrown
Into a sudden wide disunion:
They meet, they should be joyous, but they faint
Forlornly, nor have words to breathe their plaint;
For if they had, the wintry spell were gone
That holds them in its wizard vacancy.
Was not that chill upon us yesternight?
We were as two, in scarce-acquainted plight,
And I was thinking, "My love tires of me:
She does not to my bosom creep and nestle!"
And you, perhaps, with some such thought did wrestle.

XXXVI.

To me thy love is a possession true :
Kingdoms and thrones lie outward : this within.
'Tis not like gold, deep-lock'd in miser's bin,
Which hath nor use nor life, nor sheds sweet dew
On any heart. Nor doth it mock the view
Like forms that fancy from the air can win.
Where all these end, it only doth begin :
For, like immortal Nature, ever new
And ever living, this thy love for me
Lies not apart, but mingles with my blood,
Is joy, is health, is true vitality,
The master-spring to every varying mood.
Pay I to thee the homage due to Heaven ?
Nay, God is dearer since thy love was given !

XXXVII.

This passion makes me weak, yet, oh, how strong !
Oh, what extremes in this my love do meet !
By this I throw misfortune at my feet,
Yet tremble at the very dream of wrong,
Which unto thee its shadow might prolong.
Touch but my hand, my heart with joy will beat
Upon the rack, but find in heaven no sweet
Where thou art mingled not its joys among.
'Tis long since any grief my soul could move
Unto the tenderness of childish years ;
Yet, musing all alone upon thy love,
I find that I have wept unconscious tears :
And I am bound as any slave in thee,
Yet kings are fetter'd when compared with me.



XXXVIII.

How often have I thought, before we met,
What store of things I had to say to you,
And pass'd a thousand nothings in review
To be the gems in our bright carcanet
Of future talk. But still I did forget,
When I was with you, all I had foresought
To utter; for an ocean of new thought
Was by your presence into motion set.
And often I could only look upon
Your fair, dear face, and hear your voice unbraided
Its words of beauty, and forget my own;
And I was happy, whatsoe'er we said;
Yet somehow, when you past from me away,
I mourn'd the things I had forgot to say.

XXXIX.

Gone were you, like a meteor of the night.
How fairy-like from me you fled away
With fairy step, how exquisite and light!
And you did melt from me, ere I could say
Farewell, or claim the kiss, my vested right
Of every eve, which, half the time we talk,
I am thinking of, and fearing lest the blight
Of prying eyes my dearest joy should balk:
And, lo, it was yourself did rob my bliss
While I was plotting it, and leading you
Just where the bowery lane most shadowy is,
A spot propitious to our dear adieu.
Did some leaf rustle? Did you feel alarm?
Or was the sudden flight a little wily charm?

XL.

You said we had a fortnight yet to be
Together. It hath dwindled to ten days
Already, and that small eternity
I look'd to, soon will to the backward gaze
Be but a speck of Time. I feel as one
Prison'd of old within that iron room,
Each day made less, each day a window gone,
That dwindled from a chamber to a tomb,
Till it became a death-grasp and a shroud;
So the free space, I live in, fast doth shrink,
Narrowing about me, and the knell is loud
Which tolls my counted minutes to the brink
Of that great wrench from life, which, on the day
We part, death's burden on my soul will lay.

XLI.

As one, who walks along a dizzy steep,
Feels, if he once should scan the precipice,
His step would totter into the abyss,
And so averts his eye from the great deep,
And to the narrow path his gaze doth keep,
So dare I not look on the gulf which is
Before me—the dread hour when I shall miss
Thy presence—so with fix'd gaze I creep,
Coasting the edge of that huge yawning time
When we must sever. Till I cross that cleft
I do not listen to the clock's quick chime,
But grasp the precious seconds that are left
Like gold-grains in a hasty river's bed,
That I may yet feel rich before my wealth be fled.

XLII.

In the wild moment when we said farewell,
Whence came a startling gleam of hidden pleasure?
It was that, then, my thoughts were free to measure,
In thy abandonment and bosom's swell,
Thy love, which words had not sufficed to tell,
Which, in bright hours of joy and sparkling leisure,
Lay richly hoarded like a miser's treasure,
Then only drawn from out its secret cell,
When daylight sleeps. What rapture and what pain
Were strangely blended in that parting strife,
And in conflicting union yet remain!
Ay, thus to be beloved is light and life
E'en in that death and darkness of the heart,
Which is true bosoms' portion when they part.

XLIII.

We silly creatures, in our parting hour,
Thought only to be happy. Nay, we *were*!
Because each other's presence is the dower
That would snatch flowers from edges of despair.
And we did seem unable utterly
To realise that in some moments more
You would be speeding fast from me, and I
Left lagging on that dull and vacant shore
He stands on who is left behind. Oh, you
Are happier than I, for you have change
And motion, and a prospect of things new
Awaiting you wherever you may range;
But I am left in the old spots of gladness,
So desolate now, to fret myself to madness.

XLIV.

Into this dead-house, for I call it dead
Now you are gone, you did put life and light,
And youthful laughter. Ay, e'en when you fled—
In our glad season—there remain'd a bright
Refraction of your presence, such as, when
The sun sinks, it bequeaths the coming night,
A summer night, so short, that soon again
The clouds catch fire at the recover'd sight
Of their loved God. But winter-nights are long,
And have no dear remembrance of the sun ;
And I am in my winter, whose worst wrong
Is that it came so suddenly, that I
Was dreaming not e'en autumn could be nigh.

XLV.

Is Absence that Pygmalion to thy soul,
It is to mine? Hast thou by it new strife,
Revealings, kindlings, mysteries of life?
When thou wert with me thou didst all control
The blood in me that might too rashly roll :
Thy very kiss was as a prison pure
That did the madness of my thought immure.
Now, as fire legibles a secret scroll
Whose cunning words are only shown by heat,
Thy absence proveth what is writ in me,
And how my heart with wishes wild doth beat :
I dream, I pant, I fuse myself in thee.
Strange, that the immaterial should condense
More than all matter can, the fire of sense !

XLVI.

How tedious is all company to me !
How much the rather would I sit alone,
And only feel my wretched want of thee,
Than thus be interrupted in my moan !
The sole, sad joy of absence is o'erthrown
When my vex'd thought from its great inner deep
Is wrench'd away. Oh, then I am as one
Whom an officious hand disturbs in sleep,
When he lies drinking rest after long toil,
And panteth for the slumber of a year
To wipe away some heavy day's turmoil !
But I, more cursed than he, must strive to grace
My sad upwaking with a smiling face.

XLVII.

The hour, when I should look into my heart,
And find my love for thee no living thing,
But a cold word, were deadlier suffering
Than any known despair or worldly smart ;
Yea, more than if thy love for me could start
From its unswerving course. For to this sting
The thought of my own truth a balm would bring,
And I would build for thee a tomb apart
Within my soul ; and weep for thee as dead,
Loving thee still. But to myself forsworn,
How were I of all life disherited !
Then fear not ! My inconstancy would be
A deeper treachery to myself than thee !

XLVIII.

I know that thou wilt love me to the end,
That thou wilt cling to me though all forsake,
That thou my joy and sorrow wilt partake,
Though every love were far, and every friend :
So on thy faithful love do I depend,
As on a mother the most trusting child,
And never came to me a thought so wild
As that thy upright constancy should bend.
Why is it, then, pale shadows, like to fear,
Feigning thy love may change, dim the excess
Of my great joy ? If I read nature clear,
Not thee I dread, but my own happiness,
Which, lest it tempt Fate's envy, I make less,
And cloud it down to suit Earth's cloudy sphere.

XLIX.

Yes, I relieve the fear of o'ermuch joy
By self-wrought sorrow ! When Distrust is bare
Of torment to me, I, half trembling, dare
To play at jealousy. But how alloy
My happiness with that ? Thou being coy
Even to me ? Thus will I weave my care !
I will be jealous of the evening air,
That with thy bosom-kerchief dares to toy,
And chide thy pillow for that thou dost press
Thy cheek to it. Nay, I'll be wroth with thee
For wastry of my vested happiness,
For gazing at the stars too tenderly,
Or giving idle flowers such looks divine
As I am robb'd of, and should be but mine.

L.

Sweet, I forswear at Jealousy to play,
Lest I too fiercely should be whirl'd and caught
In my own rash machinery of thought !
I had begun to question the delay
Of thy return—why I was bid to stay—
Why nothing from thy hand ? Was I forgot ?
And, if forgot, for whom ? Quick let me blot
These treasons out, that burst their sudden way
Into my brain without my heart's consent :
They are too poor to ask forgiveness for !
And now thy letter stills my bosom's war.
Ah ! 'twas the want of this dear nutriment
Made me rave idly as the dying do :
Now, coming back to life, I know the false from true.

LL.

Yet, what if thy veil'd eyes, with subtle wile,
Possess an art my judgment to hoodwink ?
That thou, being false, dost truth with falsehood link,
And gloss the great perfection of thy guile ?
I saw thee once upon another smile :
Nay, I will swear I did ! At least I think
That thou of smiling wert upon the brink,
But check'd thyself. Why art thou many a mile
Away from me ? Art thou perhaps with him
Who caught that smile, then from amongst us melted ?
It must be so ! For who of sense so dim,
Who, to chase thee, would not be spurr'd and belted ?
Save only I, who by deep vow am bound
Not to encroach upon thy hallow'd ground ?

LII.

I have been banish'd by thy own command,
And that's suspicious! Wherefore did I pin
My word to pledged obedience? Wherefore spin,
From dark-webb'd prudence, for myself a band
Strong-knit Love's truer prompting to withstand?
Love owneth absence for its only sin ;
Why hast thou plungèd me so deep therein ?
Nay ! Did I know what sufferings I should brand
Upon myself, when, in a mood too bold,
I said, " 'T is better thou should'st be away ?"
Now, Pain comes, like a torturer of old,
To wring the truth from me—no grief could lay
Such torment on me as my folly brought
When I submitted to your tyrant thought.

LIII.

If that thou love another, let me know
The worst ; a lingering death I would not die !
Let me not feed on sick uncertainty,
A forced profession, or a courteous show
Of love, that tells how love is mined below ;
Let me not nourish hope by doubt, nor try
The revelation of an alter'd eye !
When sentence is gone out, the quickest blow
Is the most merciful ; a certain hate
Outweighs the joy of an uncertain love ;
And ours was not so weak it should remove,
A wasted thing, through dull oblivion's gate !
Give it a worthy burial ! If thou prove
One thought that wavers, crush me with my fate !

LIV.

Dost thou play with me? O beware, beware!
If of your faith one atom you let slip,
You hurl a stone into a crater's lip
That makes the whole volcano spring in air.
There's danger for you, as upon the stair
Which hung of old before the Virgin's kiss,
Whence the next step was into an abyss;
So, if you leave me, there is no repair
For your dread deed. You have not in me woke
A trim and holiday passion, but such strife
As that fierce gambling where men stake a life
Upon a single cast. And you wreck two,
If you are false, because my destiny is you.

LV.

Ay, you may love another! But it will
Not profit you, nor him! It cannot be
That you should love another one like me,
And I must be your fondest lover still.
For lives the man, whose soul avails to fill
All time, as I do, with one thought of thee?
Grant he hath love, he hath no memory
Of loving hours by forest, lawn, and rill,
Whose silent secret rests with us alone:
Grant he with me in memory could cope,
(A poor surmise!) hath he my vast of hope,
Which grasps a life, leaves it, and rushes on
Past life, past time, past all heaven's wealth of spheres,
To reach the region of uncounted years?

LVI.

Do I, in truth, love thee so over-madly ?
I have been calm to day, and almost wean'd
From thoughts of thee ; so wondrously seren'd
That I, for once, look'd on the heavens gladly :
And, after this, I went not slow and sadly
To think that I had been so light of sense,
So folded in a sweet indifference ;
Remorse made this no crime—at least, not deadly !
But Love is full of infinite surprises—
A player that plays all parts—hath all disguises.
Sudden, I find this mimic apathy
Was but the spring a tiger backward takes
Before a crushing leap he onward makes.
Great Heaven ! How I rush on to love of thee !

LVII.

Thy thought is tuned to mine. That makes the charm
Of very absence. Thou, at this calm hour,
Dost hear my voice ring in thy ear : the power
Of my soul is upon thee : there's a swarm
Of fancies round thee—of affections warm.
The stars are out ! It is a night divine
As any that upon our walks did shine
Of old, when thou wert folded by my arm.
Is not thy dream to have it round thee now,
As mine is, that it were thy waist enringing ?
And that, at intervals, our words did flow
From richest silence and our full hearts springing,
As coy as violets are under their leaves
When Spring about the world her mist of beauty weaves ?

LVIII.

Omens! Oh, all to love is ominous!
A comet hath been glittering in the sky,
Which I have gazed on with a troubled eye;
For these are but unholy stars, and thus,
Ere Love I trusted turn'd ungenerous,
Ay, when I dreamt not any fate was nigh,
A wandering orb gave evil augury;
And I do fear some sorrow threatens us!
And then, of late, my dreams have been too fair,
And dreams are said to go by contraries;
And I have broke a glass, which had been dear
To me from childhood. Taunt me for unwise,
I fail these omens from me to remove,
And doubt they bode some mischief to our love.

LIX.

Oh, how this absence hath a dreary blank,
Where Fear may write her deadly characters!
When Jealousy no more within me stirs,
And feign'd Indifference, like a weak sea-bank,
Lets in a mightier flooding where it sank,
Imagination, strongest when she errs,
Brands in my soul her cruel calendars,
And draws her terrors in a phantom-rank.
Poor friend, dear soul, I then do expiate
All wrongs of thought to thy fidelity.
I paint thee victim to some hideous fate—
Dying perhaps—and I away from thee!
Yes! thou art sick to dying! Were it not so,
How could my love-wise soul such anguish know?

LX.

The morning comes, of health so prodigal,
 I feel that health must on thy being beam ;
 And the blue sky absorbs each dreary dream.
 The flowers invite me to a festival,
 To which I deem thee also they do call,
 And happy auguries in the ascendant are.
 Oh, Love is poised upon so light a bar,
 His diamond scales with trifles rise or fall !
 Where are my dismal fears of yesterday ?
 Gone . . . aye, already thrown whole ages back
 Into Time's gulf ! O thou warm living ray
 Of my existence, how upon thy track
 Could I fling shadows ? All things have delight,
 And thou above them all art young and bright.

LXI.

We sat beneath a tree. No summer-day
 Was half so fair as that ! A breath of spring
 Still touch'd the earth with tender lingering :
 Our prospect was not large, but meadowy-gay.
 Some distant peasants, turning their sweet hay,
 Did somehow seem to make our communing
 More intimate. Sudden, the blossoming
 Of an Arcadian thought I did obey,
 And carved our cyphers on the beechen rind
 Above us ; hiding them in freakish knot :
 Nor were old emblems of pure faith forgot,
 Anchor and Cross, religiously entwined.
 Then did you murmur, in a faltering tone,
 " Will you not oft come here, when I am gone ? "

LXII.

Gone! Yes; that time is buried in the Past!
You I may see again, but not the face
Of those same moments, by the self-same grace
Accompanied: for all things alter fast.
Fortune is fickle, e'en though faith should last:
Circumstance creepeth on with alter'd pace,
And Alteration doth with dim hand trace
Records on features where the heart has cast
No deeper change. Though I shall love thee still,
E'en to life's latest gasp, and, though thy hair
Were silver'd, only see the golden there,
Will clocks have struck no onward hours, or will
The air, the sun, the leaves, the green grass be
The same that charm'd us underneath the tree?

LXIII.

Yet Alteration is but half the truth!
The river passes, but the stream still flows
And fills its channel with eternal youth
Long as shall gush the fountain whence it flows.
Why should I grieve that moments are bereft
Of the same joy their predecessors brought,
While still to me immortally is left
The resurrection of my silent thought?
Ah yes! The dim and reverential Past,
Which even beautifies recorded sorrow,
Doth over joy more lasting beauty cast
Than when it bloom'd, yet dreaded the to-morrow.
Quick! ere I mourn the old evanish'd prime,
Let me unbury that great joyous time!

LXIV.

Which was most full? Our silence or our speech?
Ah, sure our silence! Though we talk'd high things
Of life and death, and of the soul's great wings,
And knowledge pure which only Love can teach;
And we have sat beside the lake's calm beach
Wordless and still, a long and summer day,
As if we only watch'd the insect-play,
Or rippling wave; then simply ask'd of each,
"Shall we not this remember, this sweet time,
Thousands of years hence?" For we felt the while
Those hours must be immortal, and must climb
Before us up to God's undying smile,
Where we should find them one day, and this creed
Was scripture to us, and made full our need.

LXV.

No! no! It never can be natural
We two should be asunder! What are we
Divided? What is any unity
That from itself doth separate and fall?
We are so framèd to be all in all
Unto each other, we must either be
Twin lives, and so encrownèd joyously,
Or something that is pleasure's funeral;
An evening cloud without its sunset-glow,
A mountain-cleft without its summer-stream,
A ravaged garden where no flowers do blow,
A sleep whose comrade is a fever'd dream.
Oh, how like these, when you from me are rent,
I mar my being's full accomplishment!

LXVI.

Our second parting left me for a while
Of thoughts a precious but tumultuous store,
Like that which from our first away I bore.
Thy Love's revealings did to memory smile
So fair, my soul they seem'd to reconcile
Almost to absence; and for evermore,
Methought, such balm into my wounds would pour.
"Love needs not"—so did I my heart beguile—
"To feed his gaze with gross material sight.
I, by his inward eyes, my love behold,
And through the world and troubles manifold
Shall carry with me all my own delight."
Somewhat of this was true. But now I prove
Not in a day we learn the lore of Love.

LXVII.

Of yore, within my heart a spiritual throne
Was built for thee. Not yet thy love was blent
With life's familiar forms of fond content,
And daily communing. Ere these were known,
Of sweet and bitter but the seed was sown
Within my breast. So when from thee I went
I took into the realms of banishment
Of love the happier heritage alone—
His records dear, his faith's tranquillity.
But now I miss thee at accustom'd hours,
And not one lovely show of streams or bowers
But tells me only what is gone from me,
And how I these with willing soul could view
If thou, beloved, didst look upon them too.

LXVIII.

E'en as a mountain-brook, whose feeding snows
Have yielded to the warm perfidious sun,
No more doth in its channel calmly run,
Nor make contented music as it goes,
But ever more and more perturbèd flows
As summer had its winter but begun :
E'en so for me life's calmer day is done,
Since Love more beaming melted my repose.
So did my thoughts, of yore a gentle stream,
Wander through absence with a soft delay,
Dallying with birds and flowers and many a gleam
Of tender light. Now, changed as in a dream,
They in impetuous torrents bound away
Towards thee, their ocean, without check or stay.

LXIX.

Oh, they are wrong who banish Hope from Hell !
Long as the soul her nature shall retain,
A strong bold courage shall help mortals well
To wrestle with substantial forms of pain :
But to endure, to suffer, and to wait,
To sit and droop in mute expectancy—
This is a hell no fancy need create,
For I am in that hell while waiting thee.
And I have thought—when suddenly I clasp
My arms upon my breast, as if I there
Thee in their fond entanglement could grasp,
But find them only close on empty air—
If to recall thee all things else were slack,
The aching of my heart would bring thee back.

LXX.

How would these passions melt away in rest
Thou being near me! There alone the cure
Of all that my great struggling thoughts endure,
And shut within the silence of my breast.
As when a ship, which adverse winds molest,
Should it put back to seek its haven sure,
Sweeps round with glad and graceful curvature,
And, in the moment it obeys the hest
Of the imperious gale, finds welcome ease,
No more doth labour on with stress and strain,
But lightly glides along the yielding seas;
So is my way from thee a weary pain,
But for my spirit what repose would be
E'en in the shaping of my course towards thee!

LOVE VERSES.

1

I.

THE INCONSTANT CONSTANT.

I HAVE loved many. Am I then
A mere inconstant amongst men?
Inconstant? No! My heart doth move
Still on one pole:
Fix'd is the worship of my soul.
My own true Love, throughout the weary world
I sought, but found not; so did ever rove
Where I, by shadows, was perversely hurl'd
From grasping Hope's substantial treasure-trove.
But, through all fleeting forms,
And passion-storms,
Alice, in real deed, my only Love
Thou art, and wert. First, as a dream of youth,
Passing through many a phase of fantasy
And cheatery of the eye,
Then, as thyself, a warm and living truth.

II.

FORE-KNOWLEDGE.

BEFORE I met thee, O my love,
In dreams I felt thy kiss
Upon my lips ! and I did prove
An antedated bliss.

When first into the room you came
Appearing to mine eyes,
I knew a vision, long the same,
And did not feel surprise.

As every look of thine did dawn,
I did not thrill or start ;
It was but as a veil withdrawn
From something in my heart.

Methought a well-known tender call
In you my soul could trace ;
It seem'd to me so natural
One day to see your face.

And, when your voice upon my ear
Its first sweet spell had thrown,
'Twas not the music was so dear
As the familiar tone.

Whate'er was said, whate'er was done
In that first meeting's store,
With the heart's prophecy was one;
I knew it all before!

Part of my life you seem'd to be
In an eternal scope:
A hope accomplish'd beam'd in thee
I had not known was hope.

Calmly my spirit seem'd to melt,
And seal thee for its own;
Others were present; but I felt
As if we were alone!

And the same mystery, you say,
To me your heart did move;
Then can we doubt that both, that day,
Began an endless love?

III.

PARTING.

WHEN kindred soul with soul hath met,
How Memory loves the precious boon,
And yet we feel a fond regret
To think those hours were fled so soon.

The livelong eve in converse bright
Had thought's electric flashes play'd,
Yet, when the hour has taken flight,
We grieve so much was left unsaid.

And, sometimes, when glad moments flee,
There comes a fancy o'er the brain,
'Twere better meetings should not be
If partings always give such pain.




IV.

A DISCOVERY.

METHOUGHT it was the air and sun
That made me feel so blest,
And when I look'd into the West,
I said "How sweetly doth the day down run!"
I had forgot that one was by
Who gave that glow to earth and sky.

Methought it was the laughing throng
Of children and their play
Which made the house appear so gay,
And sound so glad with echoing song:
I had forgot one voice so clear
Which also used to mingle there.

We sought the sea. O happy time!
Methought my bosom swell'd
With joy that I again beheld
The long-unseen great ocean-field sublime;
I had forgot I gazed on too
An eye more bright than ocean's blue.



That air, that sun, that ocean field,
That house with children gay,
I seek again. Ah well-away!
I find that they not any joy can yield.
For one is gone : and now I know
What made all things to smile and glow.

V.

REASONABLE WISHES.

I wish thee happy :—yet indeed,
Such is Love's selfishness,
I wish that none but I succeed
With joy thy heart to bless.

I wish thee glad, where'er thou go,
And yet—in every spot—
I wish that thou a want may'st know
To tell where I am not.

To thee may Life its treasures give,
Yet thine the feeling be—
That only thou begann'st to live
When thou hadst look'd on me!

VI.

ALICE AT THE BALL.

BUT yester-eve we seem'd as one
In thought and quiet dream,
And both our lives might seem to run
In the same tranquil stream.

How different is our lot to-night !
In separate spheres we dwell :
You in a scene of revel bright,
I in my silent cell.

And such is life ! We meet, we part,
Each goes a different way ;
One with a sad and anxious heart,
Another, light and gay.

Yet would I not my thought's calm dower
Exchange at Pleasure's shrine :
Thy memory fills this silent hour ;
Hast thou such joy as mine ?

VII.

QUESTIONS.

TELL me, when we do not meet
From the morn till even-shine,
Shoots a pang, with impulse fleet,
From my bosom into thine?

Say, when comes the accustom'd hour
For the walk by grove or lea,
Is there an absorbing power
Which would draw thy feet to me?

When the twilight shades are round
Nature, in thy distant home,
Does my voice about thee sound,
Ever gently murmuring, "Come?"

Hast thou still an eager sense
All thy wealth of love to cast,
As my bosom's recompense
For its sad deceptions past?

If so, our two lives may run
Forward, with a fervent stream,
Still incorporate in one
When Death itself shall be a dream.

VIII.

TO ALICE.

YES! Thou hast robb'd me of my rest,
But I shall deem my loss is gain
So long as I within my breast
Thy love in full exchange retain.

But, oh, how bankrupt were my store,
If once thy love from me were fled,
If you, who steal my peace, no more
Should give me happiness instead!

IX.

RETROSPECT.

LONELY is the room :

Every wind is still as death ;
E'en the fire doth hold its breath :
Only the ticking clock
Doth the ear of Silence mock.
Burn the lights as in a tomb
In the lonely room.

Now again 'tis eve:


Change of sadness comes to me;
Moan the winds o'er lake and lea:
Like sad voices round
The forsaken house they sound :
Ghostly forms gaunt shadows weave:
Mournful is the eve.

Once more flies the day :
'Tis, methinks, a happy night :
Ruddy glows the fire, and bright.
On the pictured walls
Soft and shadowy radiance falls :
Everything looks calm and gay : —
Thou wert here to-day !

X.

I WRITE no verses unto thee
When thou art at my side,
Because thou art my poesy,
Nor need I to provide
A double harmony.

But, when thou art away, I sing
Like any mateless bird
That cannot find its love in spring ;
Thus I, by passion stirr'd,
Ease my heart's fluttering.



XI.

SHORT, BUT LONG.

You say that but six little weeks
We have each other known ;
And that the time is very short,
And hath so quickly flown :

But then, when first we met, you know,
We both within us felt
The dreams of many hundred years
Into our memory melt.

No loves of old familiar days
Could so familiar be
As I to you (you've told me so),
And you, my love, to me.

And the six weeks that have elapsed
Since first you met my ken,
Count time by feelings, not by hours,
What will their length be then ?

And just reflect how much for us
Those six short weeks have done ;—
They've stamp'd the colour of our lives,
They've made two beings one.

More thoughts have trembled through our brains,
And swept our bosoms o'er,
In that short time ; and more we've lived
Than in our lives before.

'Tis true I cannot talk with thee
Of home and early ties,
Of friends in childhood known to both,
Or mutual memories ;

Yet every careless word we say
Out of some depth doth grow ;
Our spirits can look back to times
More long than " Long ago."

And childhood is a recent thing
To what our hearts recall ;
I do not ask, " Why wert thou not
Bred in my father's hall?"

Nor am I vex'd we have no stores
To earthly memory due ;
We cannot mutual joys revive,
But then no sorrows too.

And thy fresh youth of maiden joy
Doth me with bliss surround :
I've cultivated thorns too long,
And sown a barren ground.

Kindred are oft but kin by name,
Our thoughts they never knew ;
An hour of sympathy is worth
An age of love untrue.

And which claims most? The tie that spans,
Or that which makes a gulf?
And which is oldest? Love that counts
By eras, or itself?

An orb, a circle, is our love ;
Its ocean hath no shore ;
It hath Eternity behind,
Eternity before.

E'en if we grant what greybeards say,
And own our love is new ;
New things, at least, have freshest bloom,
And sparkle most with dew.


New is our love? Why, so are flowers—
The light—the vernal sod—
New as to-day, and yet as old
As the eternal God !

A thousand outworn things will die,
 Yet this be newly sprung;
 Things insincere alone are old,
 True hearts are always young.

If still our Love demands some charm,
 Some grace Time only lends,
 Its newness is at least a fault
 Which every moment mends.

XII.

EACH day didst thou with undesignèd art
 Enter within a new fold of my heart,
 And take possession with a force so free
 That now my being is one pulse of thee.
 When absent or when present to my sight,
 'Tis you who make within me day or night,
 And Earth for me has but two regions got —
 One where thou art, and one where thou art not.
 Strange contradictions in my bosom fit;
 I've halved existence, yet I've doubled it:
 Emptied of self, I come no void across,
 And all my gain is centred in my loss.



XIII.

I AM beloved; and Life again is dear!
I see the Morning in her robe of grey
Faint smiling o'er the distant heights appear,
And do not from her sweet light turn away :
I am beloved !

I am beloved; and Hope has look'd on me!
For me the noontide is no more too bright:
I share the joy of earth, and air, and sea,
Nor is the day too long for my delight:
I am beloved !

I am beloved ! The gentlest summer-moon
No longer mocks me with her quiet beams:
Forgetfulness was once the dearest boon
That sleep could bring. But now I ask for dreams.
I am beloved !

XIV.

I CARE for nothing, while thy love
For me doth in thee thrill,
And, if thy heart from me remove,
I care for nothing still.

In seeming balance are descried
Love living or destroy'd:
But, oh, what, aching worlds divide
The fulness and the void !

XV.

THE REASON WHY.

THINK not, my love, I riot on thy cheek
Because it is the softest ever prest ;
That I thy white hand's thrilling pressure seek
Because it 'minds me of the cygnet's nest :
Oh no ! oh no ! It is because I love thee !

Think not the Paradise of those red lips
Lures me with transport of material joy ;
That, if my brain faints in a dim eclipse
When I dare touch them, this is Earth's alloy :
Oh no ! oh no ! It is because I love thee !

Think not the balmy breath that's breathed by thee
Pervades my being with unmeasured bliss
Because thou hast, with innocent felony,
Robb'd the young May of Zephyr's sweetest kiss :
Oh no ! oh no ! It is because I love thee !

O dearest, fairest !— Is it then thy mind,
Though to thy beauty 'tis so true a mate,
That doth about me such strong fetters wind ;
Do I thy worth so nicely calculate ?
Oh no ! I nothing know but that I love thee !

XVI.


THE WORST ABSENCE.

ABSENCE, to paint thy pangs we pour
Full many a mournful lay :
But I will tell thee of a store
Of griefs more keen than they.

It is the *presence*, in a crowd,
Of the belovèd one,
When links, that bound what hearts had vow'd,
Seem loosen'd and undone.

When eyes, that with a loving beam
For us alone have burn'd,
Coldly from us averted seem,
Or bright on others turn'd.

When laughter rings, and mirth goes round,
And we must play a part,
And echo every hollow sound
That only mocks the heart.




O then, nor gulfs, nor oceans wide,
Nor pestilence, nor doom
Us from our treasure can divide,
So much as that one room !

XVII.

I **HATE** the world, whose feverish strife
Sometimes entangleth thee ;
And hate it still the more, because
It steals thy looks from me.

Then, Alice, from this treacherous foe
Let us yet timely flee,
Lest it not only steal thine eyes,
But rob thy heart from me.



XVIII.

WHEN thou art gone, wilt thou regret
No more to view my face,
And feel that thou canst never let
Another fill my place?

Though laugh and song be round thee thrown,
And friends encircle thee,
Wilt thou still find thyself alone
If once deprived of me?

Wilt thou, though girlish fancy draws
The world with aspect fair,
Choose rather solitude—because
My thought most meets thee there?

Or will thy spirit, lightly bruised,
Too soon my loss restore,
And feel that if thou art amused
Thou needest me no more?

At evening's sacred hour serene,
When now so oft we meet,
Say, wouldst thou seek some other scene
With step as light and fleet ?

Oh, how these questions thrill my breast
As "Yes" or "No" prevails ;
Methinks my very life of life
Is trembling in the scales !

XIX.

WHEN a depth of love
In the heart doth move,
Sweeter 'tis to say
To-morrow than to-day:
Yet I am not loth
To say, "To-day and to-morrow both!"

XX.

THE day is shining bright,
 All things have life and cheer,
 Yet I have no delight,
 Nature looks dark and drear,
 Because thou art not here.

In vain the flowers are gay,
 In vain the birds sing clear,
 Nothing has bloom to-day,
 Nothing can charm my ear,
 Because thou art not here.

Naught with my wish agrees
 Unless when thou art near;
 But winter blasts would please,
 And gloomy mists be dear,
 If only thou wert here!

XXI.

THE HILL.

To the hill, to the hill,
I am ever looking still;
For sometimes, there stepping fleet,
Glance my maiden's little feet.

Now I hope those small feet will
Soon come tripping down the hill.
Is it so? Ah, hope deceives!
'Twas the twinkling of the leaves!

Now, my beating heart, be still!
Some one hastens down the hill—
Other steps my hopes betray:
Ah, we shall not meet to-day!

What could so my fancy fill
That I dreamt thee on the hill?
As if other form could shine
With a shadowy grace like thine!

Who but thou with joy can fill
That bright pathway on the hill?
Though that hill my peace doth take,
How I love it for thy sake!

Even when we do not meet,
There I would behold thee, Sweet!
For, when thou hast past the hill,
With my heart I see thee still.

XXII.

I do not grieve that I have given
My very soul to thee,
But that to give it thee again
Is now denied to me.

XXIII.

I WANT you! I want you! and that is all my song!
I want you! I want you! the time it is so long!
I want you! I want you! what matters it to me
How rich I am in other things, if I am robb'd of thee?

The wise no doubt are very wise; but oh they tire me so!
Since you have taught my heart to love, it does not care to know.
The witty may make others laugh, but fail to make me gay;
I'd rather look at you than hear the best that they can say.

I want you! I want you! The day is very fair,
And thousand things of light and life are in the earth and air;
But still my heart, incapable to share the glad delight,
Says nothing but "I want you!" from morning until night.

I want you! I want you! In vain men cry to me—
How fair our shining crowds and our nightly revels be!
I'd rather sit alone, if thou art from me torn,
Repeating but "I want you!" from evening until morn.

XXIV.

BREATHE no vows—oh, breathe no vows,
 To love me ever !
 None, none have deeply sworn to me
 They would love me utterly,
 But Falsehood came, or Destiny,
 Our Fates to sever !

Give me not—oh, give me not
 One of those shining
 Ringlets of thine ! . . . Ah me, I know
 'Tis ominous when maids bestow
 Locks of their hair, and doth foreshow
 Love's disentwining !

Give no ring—oh, give no ring
 For our love-token !
 Such golden circlets, men allege,
 Are of eternity a pledge ;—
 Alas, I've found them on the edge
 Of Faith soon broken !

Rather give — oh, rather give
 To me the blossom
Of thy rich thought, when I am not
Beside thee, but in some far spot
Wander, by all the world forgot,
 Shrined in thy bosom.

Or one look — oh, one fond look,
 Meant for me only,
When lighted halls, and mirth and song
Send back our hearts, amidst the throng,
More to each other to belong,
 And but more lonely.

Dearer yet — oh, dearer yet,
 Some word low-springing
Up from thy lips, when twilight is
Upon the silent world — the bliss
Of thy hands' pressure — ah, a kiss
 Long, long, and clinging!

XXV.

I HEARD the nightingale so sadly
 Singing on a thorn above,
 Ah, I said, how thou art grieving !
 No ! sigh'd she—I love ! I love !

Her the stock-dove now was joining,
 By sad notes the soul to move :
 Ah, I said, how thou art pining !
 No ! wail'd she—I love ! I love !

So it is with me ; you see me
 Rage, and weep, and anguish prove ;
 Ah, you say, how much you suffer !
 No, indeed !—I love ! I love !

XXVI.

SUMMER's over—Summer's past !
Other Summers shall return,
But that Summer shall recast
Itself no more from out the urn
Of thrifty Time. O never more !
Waves revisit not the shore !
Summer's o'er !

Fair it was, oh heavenly fair !
Sunshine had it, song of birds,
Morning stillness, evening air,
And, more than all, fond human words !
The birds again their song shall pour ;
But those words shall come no more !
Summer's o'er !

XXVII.

“ Good bye ! ” What is it ? “ God be with you ! ”
Wherefore, then, bedew the eye
With such heavy drops of sorrow
When we lingering say, “ Good bye ? ”
Oh, it is the word of parting,
Therefore comes the bitter smarting !

XXVIII.


ALICE GONE.

WAS I not all yesternight
Murmuring to thee many things,
Memories of our past delight,
Happy hours from purest springs?

Did not a most yearning air
Pale with sorrow, pale and dim,
In the night we parted were,
Faintly round thy pillow swim?

All the night, till morning prime,
Hadst thou not a sense of moan—
Voices saying, “Ah the time,
Ah the pleasant time is flown!”

“Other joys may meet our touch”—
So the meaning voices said—
“But the days we loved so much
Are for ever—ever fled!”



Then, at morn, methinks the moan
Parted with the parting gloom,
And a softer, happier tone
Breathed around thy quiet room.

Yes! for then a comfort stole
On myself, and whisper'd me ;
“ All Love's joys within the soul
Live and breathe eternally !”

XXIX.

BREAKING OFF.

If thou wert dead, it might be sweet
 The tear for thee to pour :
 But there's no cure for this distress ;
 We live—yet meet no more !

And Memory that loves the tomb
 Is now but jealous pain ;
 Yet still to banish Memory
 My very will is vain.

For, from thy dead love, on my path
 Shines down an after-glow,
 Like light from stars that have gone out
 A thousand years ago.

And thou art free ; but I am bound,
 And bind myself anew.
 I know that thou wert false. What then ?
 My heart shall still be true !

Forgive thee? Yes! nay more, I ask
From thee no fond regret.
While others say, "Remember me!"
I only say, "Forget!"

XXX.

ATTEMPTED INCONSTANCY.

PAST, I don't want you! Future, you bore me!
Oh, thou Present, thou ever-dear Present,
Thou alone shalt shed happiness o'er me!
Look at me—only take care to look pleasant!

And, to make sure of thee, fair and beguiling,
This is the form in which thee I subpcena;
Come to me beautiful, come to me smiling,—
Come to me, as my own exquisite Nina!

XXXI.


SUPPOSED TO BE ALL OVER.

'Tis over: and we meet no more!
And yet in wrath we did not part:
One spasm, and the whole was o'er
Of that great story of the heart.

We never bandied words of ire,
There was no lessening of our love;
Our large emotions did not tire,
Our joy to meet did not remove;

Of one least look we did not pall,
Of fire no spark had left the eye,
And yet there is an end of all,
And, stranger still, we know not why!

And both still love, and with warm thrills
On passion's memory fondly hang,
And each is sure the other feels
So to have loved was worth the pang.



To every feeling life can know,
To that wild wondrous tempest-sweep
Fit end, in its dark sullen glow,
Is this lorn silence, full and deep !

XXXII.

TO ALICE.

THE child in its exulting walk,
Brimful of life and joy,
Will pluck the wild-flower from its stalk,
And use it for a toy.

Awhile he loves its colours gay,
Its scent and beauty rare,
Then throws it on the public way,
To die neglected there.

So, Alice, didst thou take my heart,
Then throw it heedless by,
An outcast on the world's rude mart,
To wither and to die.

XXXIII.

COMPUNCTION.

I BEAR in my breast the arrow,
 I shall carry it afar;
 The wide world is too narrow
 For the flight of my wild life-star.

I am deeply hit; as in battle,
 When a man has his death-wound,
 He smiles at the cannon's loud rattle,
 So I quietly fall to the ground.

And to me the same are all places,
 All persons. Alas my pain!
 For the one my spirit chases
 I shall never come up with again.

XXXIV.

CLEARING UP.

My love for thee began in sorrow,
And with a kind of trembling fear :
I ask'd, What will it be to-morrow,
If to-day it shed a tear ?
Is not this cloud, which hangs so near
Upon the eyelids of Love's morning,
A brooding terror, a forewarning
Of a long day, dark and drear ?

Thunder-clouds shed passion-drops :
So our souls, those lurid skies,
Made a stormy revelation
Out of our enclouded eyes.
Now our speech, cut short by sighs,
Came forth in gloomy parables,
Half-dumb mutter'd oracles,
Children of our jealousies.


Ah, thank God, this now is over !
There is a clearing and a lull,
From out of which I can discover
The steadfast and the beautiful.
Yet this calm, it is not dull,
But has something like the bridal
Heaving of the ocean tidal
About some large ship's anchor'd hull.

XXXV.

THE HOUR.

Six o'clock ! It speaks of thee !
'Tis the hour I used to come
In the twilight stealthily
To the shadows of thy home.

Six o'clock ! It speaks to me
More than meeteth mortal sense :
Six o'clock ! Eternity
Henceforth must be dated thence !



XXXVI.

RECONCILIATION.

NEAR thee I was too impassion'd,
Too upheaved myself above,
Scarce I knew what I was feeling—
Absence hath reveal'd my love.

At thy side I had a trouble
Which too near to pain did move:
I ask'd, sometimes, in thy presence,
“Can this misery be love?”

Is it form'd to be eternal?
Should it not be as the dove,
Brooding calmly o'er her treasure?
Are such storms the birth of love?

Shaken like a leaf before thee,
Crowded thoughts in stormy drove
Scarce perceived thy real merits;
Absence hath reveal'd my love!

Love, true, tender, heaven-aspiring,—
No vain meteor, born to rove!
On thy image calmly feeding
Now I know how much I love.

XXXVII.

MEETING AGAIN.

Go quick—go quick—go quick,
Oh Time, Oh Time, Oh Time!
Because I am to meet
My love at vesper chime.
But, ah, thou hearèst not!

Go slow—go slow—go slow,
Oh Time, Oh Time, Oh Time!
Because I am to quit
My love at midnight chime.
But, ah, thou hearèst not!

XXXVIII.

HAPPY.

Rest thee! Rest thee! There is peace
And beauty all around;
And the lake doth ever make
A low and loving sound.

Rest thee! Rest thee! Shadows fall
Rich with an evening hue;
And the mist hath softly kiss'd
The waves and mountains too.

Rest thee! Rest thee! Homeward veers
The white sail to its rest:
Thou, too, come! Thou know'st thy home!
Here—here upon my breast!

XXXIX.

MARRIED TO ALICE.

Oh, the joy to walk with thee,
 Where once alone I stray'd,
 Through all the love and poesy
 Wherewith the world's array'd!

Oh, the joy to talk with thee
 Of things I name to none,
 Of feelings I were never free
 To tell another one!

Oh, the joy to read with thee,
 Out of the self-same page,
 The glowing thoughts writ happily
 By masters of the age.

Oh, the joy to feel with thee
 That spring is in the air!
 That God, and life, and liberty
 For me are everywhere!

Oh, the joy to sit by thee,
To look into thine eyes;
And drink thy being utterly,
Till mine grows dim and dies !

THE THIRD GATE.

THE LAW OF LOVE.

**" You say, Sir Andrew with his love of law ;
And I, the Saviour with his law of love."**

Hood.

1. The first part of the document is a list of names and titles, including the names of the authors and the titles of the works.

2. The second part of the document is a list of names and titles, including the names of the authors and the titles of the works.

3. The third part of the document is a list of names and titles, including the names of the authors and the titles of the works.

THE LAW OF LOVE.

THROUGH the great Gate of anxious questioning,
That spans the problem of Man's troubled life ;
Through the solution of sweet human Love,
Which doth undo the bars of thought by Joy—
For he who's happy questioneth no more—
We come as pilgrims to the Law of Love,
Which whoso enters not with willing soul
May *say* he has Religion—name I give not,
Because 'tis palter'd so, to my third Gate—
But is, in truth, as ignorant of Christ
As is the Indian Fetish-worshipper.
And yet how few of those who *call themselves*
(Oh, happy irony of our good Prayer-book !)
Christians, have knowledge of the Law of Christ !
Professions of the world are clean against
Its loving sway. The Lawyer hath it not,
For he would kick, and utterly refuse
To be done by as he does, and mesh'd in pleas,
Or smother'd in a suit of Chancery.

The Statesman, great at patching protocols,
Dressing up envoys, laying a sly paw
On some choice morsel of disputed Europe,
Is a mere bungler at the Law of Christ.
The Priest, who preaches Hell, is very far
From His dear Law who came to save us all :
And, if his flock, who love the pastor more
The more he damns them, fee his chapel well,
What careth he, whom threatenings keep so fat,
How fares the Law of Love? As to the Soldier,
I do not measure him by what he does
Under command ; and, haply, he's a Christian
More than the Parson who doth bless the banner
That flaunts to battle, and who stirs such strife
In his own small parochial water-drop : —
Ah, certainly, a thousand times more Christian
Than the great monarch — of that hornèd breed
Named in the Revelation and kept up
To present times by breeding in and in ; —
Ay, than the Christian monarch who doth arm him —
Him, the unreasoning obedient soldier —
For royal, right-down, Christian butchery.
Besides, the Soldier, on the battle-field,
Often does deeds of love, that are not writ
In the despatches Pondering these things
I struck out some new meanings from old texts,
Which, if they reach thy soul as they did mine,
Will need no piecing out of chapter and verse,
Reader, to guide thee to the Law of Love.

And, once within the gates, and circled round
By Sorrow, Love, and Christ's dear loving Law,
The spirit will have leisure to be calm,
And to choose many a free meandering path
In the protected region she hath gain'd
By courage for herself. Then will she stray
Through Nature's forest-ground, and visit plains,
And trees, and flowers, and lakes that fill the urns
Of the great mountains with their liquid joy ;
Or lawns, high up amidst the lonely hills,
Unmown except by sheep, and smoother, finer,
Than those which weeding-hooks and gardeners' rollers
Constrain to velvet for the rich man's eye.
And sometimes too the soul, in her domain
Of liberty, will find sweet bye-paths lead
To the deep fountains of humanity,
And vistas that let in the world of thought
Beyond the shelter of the prospect-shades.

THE CASKET—IN TWO PARTS.

PART THE FIRST.

1.

AGES ago when, through mists of doubt,
Mortals for God were looking out,
Suddenly a great cloud was riven,
And a wonderful Casket fell down from heaven.

2.

Rich was the Casket ; no gold so rare
With the metal whereof it was wrought could compare ;
Its jewels all jewels of Earth did obscure,
But the workmanship made the materials poor.

3.

For all the marvels of Creation
Were graved upon it to admiration ;
Nothing that land or sky enfold
But on the Casket you might behold.

4.

There was the form, and there was the hue.
The flowers shone forth as if wet with dew ;
The rose was red, and the grass was green,
And the rivers were silver-bright between.

5.

And, by mystic art, the form and the hue
Had the beauty of motion too ;
And form, and hue, and motion were crown'd
With the mightiness of the world of sound.

6.

The forests rustled — the forests sigh'd —
Birds sang in the boughs where they did hide ;
And from the air came low or loud
The hush and the thunder of billow and cloud.

7.

But form, and colour, and moving strife,
And the sounding wheels of outer life
To the inner meanings such measure bore
As a grain of sand to the whole sea-shore.

8.

For the Casket to your soul did send
Man's history from beginning to end,
And, in its greatness, did declare
Things that before the beginning were.

9.

It told in its master-chiselling
How the universe itself did spring,
And how all came out of Nothingness,
Which is but a name for God, I guess.

10.

Chaos was first; in whose depths unfix'd
The seeds of the future were tumbled and mix'd,
Dim hints and sketches of worlds, that spread
In a pale, pale blue, or a fiery red.

11.

And suns, and moons, and stars were there
Dimly reeling through misty air;
And comets—the whales of space—did spout
Jets of flame from their nostrils out.

12.

Then were you drawn by some hidden tie
To fix on our own dear earth your eye,
Till on itself you took your stand
To see how that human home should be plann'd.

13.

Fire, it seem'd the eldest thing;
Down from that fell the water-spring,
Boiling and gushing about the globe,
Which wore the ocean as a robe.

14.

Black was that ocean—yet more black
As the central fires grew dull and slack;
And the ocean and air were only one,
So how could you see the stars or sun?

15.

But there came a gleam of tender light:
'Twas not from the sun or moon in the height,
But out of itself it seem'd to move
Like the white wings of a hovering dove,
Seen by its whiteness the waters above.

16.

And, as the white wings, with spirit-like motion,
Expanded and glided over the ocean,
The billows grew still that were heaving before,
And the waters were laid like a smooth green floor.

17.

It were long to tell of the fiery fountains
Which hollow'd the valleys and heaved up the mountains,
For the scene is shifting, and now I see
The first of the human family.

18.

A man and a woman! How noble they stand,
In the very heart of a glowing land.
Naked they are to our grosser sense,
Yet cloth'd in their own bright innocence.

19.

Round them the animals, fearless of wrong,
Gather in a joyful throng,
Birds and beasts of infinite frames;
For man is about to give them their names.

20.

Oh, what a moment, when first was stirr'd
The air with the sound of a human word,
And pulses of thought were set throbbing about,
Which shall rest no more till the world dies out!

21.

Then a fair false fruit on a tree was seen,
And a serpent gliding the leaves between.
“Eat — you’ll not die!” said a voice in the ear,
Such as you sometimes now may hear.

22.

You eat — you die not; but, haply, worse!
Of knowledge you gain the living curse;
And pine, till Nature, your wrongs redressing,
Tenderly turns the curse to a blessing.

23.

But, as it was, the Casket did borrow,
From the graver’s art, a long, long sorrow;
And a weeping pair from a garden fair
Went abroad in the desolate air.

24.

Darker and darker the Casket grew ;
Near the garden-gate it was fair to view,
But darker it was and more desolate
The farther from the garden-gate.

25.

Instead of sweet valley and flock-cover'd plain,
You saw cities—the dull abodes of pain—
Where gods, and demons, and monstrous things
Were mopping and mowing on bat-like wings.

26.


And the air was so laden with wickedness,
That its heavy weight on the world did press,
And squeezed up the waters out of the caves,
Till the Sea swallow'd Earth in its ravenous waves.

27.

And through the slime the Python crawls,
And men are as frighten'd animals ;
They cling to the trees—up rocks they creep—
Till, one by one, they fall into the deep.

28.

Only a few over billows dark
Are floating in a firm-built ark :
Do they mourn for the lost, or in safety laugh,
As they write the drown'd world's epitaph ?



29.

Now comes a sign of a parting grief—
A dove that is bearing an olive-leaf:
Long as the world shall last, I ween,
That leaf as an emblem of peace shall be seen.

30.

The waters are gone:— Up to heaven creeps
A tower, with broad and spiral sweeps:
All men, all wealth, all creatures in pairs
Are going up those outer stairs.

31.

Sudden, the tower stands vast and lone,
Its broken edge on the sky is shown;
Worse than a ruin—a thing incomplete—
It stands with the desert about its feet.

32.

Scatter'd—scatter'd—with broken speech
Men wander about, each hating each.
One family were they once: I would know
When again they will be so?

33.

But the waters, that swept the world so wide,
Have not only destroy'd, but purified;
And their slime has made fertile many a plain,
So the flocks, and the grass, and the tents come again.

34.

And a patriarch I see with a flowing beard,
And eyes that may be both loved and fear'd :
As he sits by his tent in the twilight dim,
Heavenly voices talk with him.

35.

Now a sleeping man is before my eyes,
And I see a ladder that goes to the skies ;
And Angels are passing, up and down,
From the heart of the man to the Heaven's crown.

36.

A cradle of rushes—a river's brim—
A babe, and a virgin over him !
Little bark thou bearest a freight
Greater than is the whole world's weight !

37.

Out of thee shall a ruler come :
Writ on his brow are power and doom.
Kings rule as they can by How and When,
But he doth govern the minds of men.

38.

The sea before his foot divides,
He leads his people between the tides ;
The foe doth follow : the waves no more sunder,
Chariot and horse are plunging under.

39.

The next compartment did express
The wonderful things of a wilderness :
Pillars of fire moved there in the gloom
That were not raised by the hot Simoom.

40.

Streams at a touch gush'd out of the rock ;
The angry earth gaped with a terrible shock :
God himself, like a thunder-frown,
Upon a mountain's head came down.

41.

And then to the stricken eye was shown
A Book made out of two leaves of stone :
Grave was the lore which that volume bore,
But on man's heart God had writ it before.

42.

Next did the desert, hot and bare,
Change to a land as a garden fair,
And the chosen swarm must settle there.
Then on the Casket you might view
How the old were slain to let in the new.

43.

And this was over the butchery scored,
“ Here are graven the wars of the Lord ! ”
And then came a voice, with a priestly smother,
“ God is father to one, but not to another ! ”

44.

Long it were each thing to tell
That about the Casket was chisell'd well ;
I only just, as if in a trance,
At some of the things can snatch a glance.

45.

I see a fair-hair'd youth who doth stand
With a giant's sever'd head in his hand :
I see that youth to manhood bred,
And then there is a crown on his head.

46.

Now I hear from the Casket's lid arise
The sweep of a thousand harmonies,
For the same hand, that a giant slew,
Though a warrior's it be, is a minstrel's too.

47.

Oh, sorrow and shame ! What is it I scan ?
A beautiful woman, a murder'd man !
But God, He is a great Forgiver,
And the strains are more sad, but sweeter than ever.

48.

Then out of the loins of the poet-king
The power of Wisdom doth branch and spring,
And I see a man in glory set,
Who rules evil things with an amulet.

49.

The brightness hath faded. By desolate billows
Captives are hanging their harps on the willows ;
For they cannot sing in that mournful spot
With which their foot is acquainted not.

50.

Back again to the promised land !
Build the temple with lavish hand !
Toss the censers—the victims nourish,
For the temple-pomp is about to flourish !

51.

Hush ! . . . On the air a murmur floats,
“ God drinketh not the blood of goats ; ”
But the multitude give a terrible shout,
Which treads the feeble murmur out.

52.

Then the Priest, with his knife and his cruel eyes,
Stands over a bleeding sacrifice.
Is it a sheep, or is it a boy ?
Wavering shadows my view destroy.

53.

But that which methinks I see afar
Is the Priest and the Prophet ever at war ;
The Priest who makes God a traffic and art,
The Prophet who points to God in the heart.

54.

The Priest who says, "Give victims and lands,
And let victim and offering pass through *my* hands."
The Prophet who says, "Neither give nor kill,
But in humbleness wait on the Father's will!"

55.

The vision changes. Tunic and helm
Sweep and flash over a conquer'd realm;
And the reeking stream of a mighty slaughter
Lies on the earth like mist on water.

56.

Then out of the vapory darkness is sped
A man with a glory round his head.
Wherever he walks through regions dim,
The light that you see by comes all from Him.

57.

And the Casket bears witness, by portent and sign,
That His mortal form is a secret divine,
And that He brings, by right of birth,
The link that is missing 'twixt heaven and earth.

58.

The winds and the billows, in love and fear,
Hold their breath His voice to hear;
And so full of power seemeth He,
You marvel not that He walks the sea.

69.

Heaven, with Tophet under it,
Tophet, the smoking brimstone-pit,
Where burn the souls rejected by Peter,
To make the joy of the righteous the sweeter.

70.

And about, and about, with endless motion,
Like the underchafing of some vast ocean
Blurting out to the air through a cavernous den,
From the Casket boil'd up the heart-whispers of men.

71.

Beautiful words, and words obscene ;—
You listen ; you know not what they mean !
None of the wonders the Casket wrought
Could match that murmur of human thought.

PART THE SECOND.

1.

Now, when the Casket fell from heaven,
To the hands of a chosen few it was given;
They were the wisest, or thought themselves so,
Of all that dwelt the skies below.

2.

The multitude cried to the chosen few,
"Tell us what with this heavenly gift we shall do?
What for the Casket is honour fit?"
The wise ones said, "Build a temple for it!

3.

"Build a temple of silver and gold,
With jaspers and jewels manifold;
And, to give the Casket honour fit,
Place it within, and worship it."

4.

So a temple was built, where you saw, if you chose,
Ceilings of glory, and pillars in rows,
And the Casket set on so bright an altar
It made your very eyelids falter.

5.

"Now," said the wise ones, "this Casket is *ours*!
Your touch would pollute its heavenly powers;
But, when we are by, we vouchsafe to say,
You may come and look at it every day.

6.

"And then, you know, this Casket is plann'd
With things that are hard to understand;
They would set your brains at tens and twelves,
So about them you must not think for yourselves.

7.


"'Tis we who have studied with eye serene
All that the groups and the figures mean:
'Tis we who will tell, while you stand around,
The signification of form and sound."

8.

Then the wise ones, more the crowd to impress,
Each made for himself a wonderful dress;
Some were in yellow and some were in black,
And others shone like a beetle's back.

9.

And long did their dresses and voices loud
So bewilder the gaping crowd,
That all, which the wise ones said, they believed,
And for real truth every word received.



10.

Besides, to doubt they were sore afraid,
For unto them ever the wise ones said,
“ You see those fires how they glow and quiver, —
Doubt us, you burn in them for ever.”

11.

But, strange to say, from a chapel near,
A mocking voice often came to the ear,
“ Do not mind *their* fires that glow and quiver,
’Tis in *ours*, if you doubt us, you’ll burn for ever.”

12.


But, oh ! the most terrible portent of all
On wise and foolish one day did fall :
There came from the Casket a voice of wonder,
That was not of earth, but like heaven’s thunder.

13.

’Twas a loving voice, though half severe —
Even the wise ones stood mute to hear,
As it said, “ The worst half of the Casket you win ;
Do not look at the outside, but search within.”

14.

Now this to the Casket-ministers
Was a terrible blow, and fill’d them with fears ;
For, sure enough, though a keyhole they see,
They never yet could find the key.



15.

And often amongst them this word had slid,
“ Shall we break it open — the Casket-lid ? ”
But, whenever of that they whisper’d low,
They shook ; for the Casket itself said, “ No ! ”

16.

So, after that, a schism began.
“ Find us the key ! ” said many a man
To the wise ones ; “ else, we cannot doubt it,
That the Casket you know nothing about it.”

17.

Then, in mighty alarm, the cunning ones call’d
Together a council closely inwall’d,
And deeply debated how they by the dower
Of the Casket should yet maintain their power.

18.

And the cleverest of all said, “ We’ll make another
Casket, of this the very brother :
But the new one shall not have the freak
Of knowing how to move and speak.

19.

Or, better still, a thing it shall be
Which shall stir by our own machinery,
Which, as we wish it, shall move or be still,
And we’ll make it say whatever we will.”

20.

So said, so done. The new Casket was made;
A new temple built, wherein it was laid;
And crowds—for men are fond of the new—
Came to look, and to worship too.

21.

Because the new Casket scarcely spoke,
Some seem'd to get rid of a terrible yoke.
Then the wise ones call'd to the foolish crowd,
“Tell us your wants: we'll tell them to God!”

22.


Then the crowd, though with somewhat of natural shrinking,
Said, “We are weary of acting and thinking;
And, the truth to utter, chiefly we
Are sick of responsibility.”

23.

“Ah,” cried the wise ones, “we've got the clue
To your joy and peace! We will manage for you.”
And the votaries were persuaded thus,
And drowsily said, “Yes, manage for us!”

24.

And the wise ones, 'tis true, managed well to make
The crowd amused, and not too wide awake;
Many a drama they acted before them,
And drew the cloak of sweet music o'er them.



25.

But, while the new sect went to sleep at ease,
The old kept murmuring like bees ;
And busily throng'd round the ancient shrine,
Crying loudly, " Our Casket alone is divine ! "

26.

What happen'd then ? It was strange to see
How every one said, " I have the key ! "
And every one rush'd to the Casket in hope,
Only, alas, it would not ope !

27.


So then all cried, " What matters it ?
'Tis sure there is no key that will fit ;
And indeed there is not a keyhole at all,
But the Casket is solid as any wall.

28.

" So let us no more in fear and doubt
Think of the inside, but look at the out ! "
And each for himself cried out amain,
" Yes, yes ! 'Tis I can the Casket explain ! "

29.

But, lo, amidst all the murmuring,
Every man saw a different thing ;
And possibly each, by his fancy fired,
Only saw what his heart desired.



30.

Then a small troop, all trimly bedight,
Some in black gowns and some in white,
Said, "To us you must come to school ;
The Casket means, we alone should rule !

31.

"Look at the Priest on the Casket graved !
What mortal unpunish'd his power has braved ?
'Tis only we who, from the beginning,
Have ever stood betwixt God and the sinning.

32.

"We know what the Casket signifies ;
And this at least is plain to our eyes,
If not to us is the Casket-key given,
We, at least, have the key of heaven.

33.

"God's nature is known to us alone,
And how He exists we will now lay down ;
You can't understand it with all your endeavour,
But, unless you do, you are lost for ever."

34.

Then some of the Black-gowns chid the White,
And cried, "You're not at all in the right.
Why judge for the people? Our plan is more wide :
Let every man for himself decide !"

35.

And to the people these liberals said,
“ Go to the Casket: you ’ve eyes in your head.
For yourselves interpret all that you see,
And mind, above all things, be free, be free !”

36.

But soon it proved that a singular way
Of setting forth freedom these Black-gowns had they ;
For, if any one’s judgment differ’d from theirs,
They kick’d him down the temple-stairs.

37.

So it came to pass all talk’d at once,
And every one call’d his neighbour, dunce :
And voices to voices answer’d loud,
Like thunder-cloud to thunder-cloud.

38.

Here stood one, who did stormily call,
“ Listen to me ! I know it all !
See those legions—that helmet—that car ;
The Casket, I know, means nothing but war :

39.

“ War, which God’s Chosen, with fire and sword,
Wage on the enemies of the Lord !”
Men listen’d awhile, till wiser grown,
They learnt the Lord’s enemies meant his own.

40.

Said another, "The Casket means only Peace!
Hark how it murmurs, 'War shall cease!'
Let us be peaceful!" . . . "Ay, all right!"—
Cried all—and straightway began to fight.

41.

Some cried, "Now learn what these figures say!
Here's a man gathering sticks on a sacred day,
And for this he is stoned. Now, what does this prove,
Except that forms are better than love?"

42.

"Abstain from amusements, a pitiful few,
Come to the temple with gravity due;
Think yourself than your neighbour better,
And you have the Casket's very letter!"

43.

Others said, "The Casket counsels ease;
It means, we should do whatever we please:
Only have faith, there's no sin in life,
And take who will his neighbour's wife."

44.

Others cried, "The Casket has this sense—
God acts by a special Providence,
And we are the souls God treasures intensely,
Because we resemble Him immensely.

45.

" See how plainly the Casket shows
That everything by favour goes !
If there's truth in yon figures, Heaven must be
A snug exclusive coterie."

46.

" Then where is the use," said a gentle voice,
" That the Bright One came to bid all men rejoice ?"
" ' *All men* ' means us," the righteous thunder'd,
" Because you count for nothing per hundred !"

47.

Sighingly back responded others,
" Nay, the Casket means we all are brothers ;
And the Man with the glory round his head
Little else in life or death has said."

48.

Other voices, that croak'd as dull and harsh
As ever did frogs in a dreary marsh,
Mutter'd, " We know that the Casket doth tell
Only of things invisible.

49.

It means, there is a horrible rout
Of spirits round us, within and without ;
It means, there are angels, but devils more plenty
In the ratio of a thousand to twenty."

50.

Others said, "Now mark us well!
The Casket means nothing but miracle.
Wonders to work proves a mission divine,
Though sometimes indeed 'tis of hell the sign."

51.

But an under-murmur was running thus:
"What will all this knowledge profit us?
To deem we are by demons pursued —
How shall it make us happy or good?"

52.

"You have told us of things that we can't understand,
And yet that we have to believe off-hand;
You have told us of wonders, and bale, and bliss,
But what is the good of knowing all this?"

53.

Then the men of zeal, who power would clutch,
Perceived that the people saw too much;
And they, and the gown'd ones who came to their aid,
A cover for the Casket made:

54.

A cover thick, a cover of leather,
Banded and welted well together,
Through which the eye could take by storm
Little enough of the Casket's form.

55.

Then, some of the crowd sang a joyful stave,
And cried, " What a beautiful cover we have !"
And so much indeed brimm'd their happiness over,
That, instead of the Casket, they worshipp'd the cover!

56.

While thus rang the voices round and round,
There was a current of larger sound,
Piercing the babble shrill and rude
With the power and depth of a multitude :

57.

No peevish sound, but mournful and ripe—
An earnest voice—like an organ-pipe
When it fills a cathedral up to the steeple :
For this, indeed, was the voice of the people.

58.

" Oh, something we want, but we know not what,
Though our hearts within us are heavy and hot ;
But the mournful thing, which we well can spy,
Is — that nobody cares if we live or die !"

59.

And then they wept, and moan'd their fill,
Till their weary hearts had wept themselves still ;
And the wise ones knew not what to say :
So a silence fell on the temple that day.

60.

And in the midst of the calm devout,
As when a storm has raved itself out,
One worshipper bent o'er the Casket-lid,
And on it a tear from his eye down slid.

61.

Suddenly, up he sprang with a start !
He felt a key grow out of his heart
Which of itself to the lock leapt free :
And the Casket flew open instantly !

62.

Open—open the Casket flew,
With a burst of light and of melody too :
Every one in the temple veil'd his face,
For he knew it was, then, a holy place.

63.

Though the words were faint, and the music dim,
All understood that beautiful hymn :
For, like some old strain, on the heart it did fall,
Some language that once had been known to all.

64.

About the heart-strings it gather'd and slid,
And the breast of the very churl it undid ;
And the babblers themselves said murmuringly—
“ Oh joy it is that we have the key ! ”

65.

And, one by one, without confusion,
All went to see there was no delusion;
By the music marshall'd they went to see
What within the Casket might be.

66.

Little within the Casket was shown,
Yet disappointment came to none.
There only leapt out to the lid above,
Again and again, the one word—Love.

67.

That word wove its beauty with chaos and night
By an interlacing of dark and bright;
In the serpent it twined its harmonies
Round about the Eden-trees.

68.

And the slaughter-groups and the battle flame
Only traced the beautiful name;
And the writing on Belshazzar's wall
Was but the same thing after all.

69.

And, among the fires eternal,
And the horrible visions of wrath supernal,
Out of the Casket these cyphers ran—
“God is happy in loving Man!”

70.

But why was this so carefully hid
In the mysteries of the Casket-lid?
Why was it not in sunbeams writ
Plainly at once, and all over it?

71.

This, too, the Casket solemnly told,
As its multiple melody gather'd and roll'd,
“Mortal, it were not good for thee
One bright thing for ever to see!

72.

“Sometimes, smiles from God come down,
Sometimes, shadows of a frown:
But dark and bright, and below and above
Are but different ways of saying—LOVE!”

ALONE WITH GOD.

THOUGH all the hours are golden in my breast
When Thou art near ;
Father, to me the vesper hour of rest
Is doubly dear.

For, now when daylight's busy pulses die,
Or scarce are stirr'd,
The tender quiet of the earth and sky
Makes Thee more heard !

Man often grieves me :—Father, never Thou !
When many a smart
Hath quiver'd o'er me, 'tis to Thee I bow
To calm my heart.

Weary I am through parching wastes to rove ;
For Thee I pine !
My orphan soul pants for a Father's love,
For only Thine !

Father ! Thou didst my spirit breathe in me !
With whom indeed
Should my inbreathed spirit talk, but Thee ?
Or who could feed

Its wants but Thou ? My sorrow, and my thrall,
All-seeing God,
I know Thou know'st ; and yet to tell Thee all
Relieves my load !

'Tis the world's evil, and my own I mourn,
The blight, the stain,
Whose inborn mischief moveth our self-scorn,
Yet doth remain !

Sin doth untune the body's instrument,
Makes it unfit
For Thy dear touches of divine content,
Prepareth it

For the dread fingers of demoniac things
That triumph o'er,
As if by right, the dull discordant strings
Thou strikest no more !

This feel we ; yet in passion's rude assault
Are helpless found.
To know the forfeit, yet commit the fault,
There lies the wound !

Sometimes with holy fire the heart hath glow'd ;
Then, passion-driven,
We rush to sin, as if there were no God,
No Christ, no Heaven !

I tremble whereunto my thoughts may lead.
The mystery
Of life, and my own heart within me breed
Perplexity.

Gushes of dark tremendous questioning
Across me thrill ;
I ask, whence came the ills, that in me spring
Against my will ?

Is mine the fault ? . . . O God, yet bear with me !
Deep in the cloud
Thou dwell'st ; sometimes Thy light I cannot see
Within that shroud !

But me not long these idle terrors shake
With vain alarms.
I dart within the gloom, and refuge take
In Thy own arms !

There, by Love's light, a glorious page I read
Of Nature's book :
Father, upon Thy fulness and my need
I fearless look !

Diviner instincts in my bosom glow
To cheer my thought :
Howe'er my evil springs, from Thee I know
It cometh not !

That sad paternity's denied to Thee ;—
It is my right !
I would not throw the ills that darken me
Across Thy light !

Oh, 'twere too dread, if in this universe
Of sin and pain
Were no existence which the blight and curse
Could never stain !

If no bright Being to the thought were given,
All-good, All-wise ;
No happy One to smile from yon pure Heaven
That o'er us lies !

Thee to my soul no selfish hopes attest :
Scanning life's load
For the mere sake of knowing Thou art blest
I own a God !

This once accepted, oh, what peace divine
Hath round me pass'd !
When of free-will I say, " The ill is mine !"
I rest at last.

Then, Father, Thy adorèd laws I see—
How fair, how true :
The mercy of thy dread severity
Breaks on my view.

Dear is Thy frown. Upon its very shades
My love I hang :
Could'st Thou permit me what my heart upbraids,
It were a pang !

And, oh, the grandeur wrought from our distress,
Our pain, our strife !
Father ! I would not wish one sorrow less
In my dark life.

God ! Saviour ! It is fit those words of light —
Of words the chief —
Should stand out on a dusky background, bright
In bold relief !

I see, and I adore ! Through woe, through guilt,
And base alloy,
The individual being is up-built
To heights of joy !

Where then is fear? Though weak our will must be,
Frail our estate,
It is Thy Goodness is Necessity,
Thy Wisdom, Fate!

This throb of life, this yearning discontent,
These forms retreating
Are but the working of the Permanent
Up from the Fleeting!

Ah, Thou dost lurk in many a dark disguise
Our hearts to prove!
Then smilest forth, the bosom to surprise
With some new love!

I look to heaven — to all Thy burning stars!
Is there not room
Enough to range in order all that mars
Time's tangled loom?

Panting, I ask, Shall I rush on to know
The larger years
Of Saturn, or be fused into the glow
Of sunnier spheres?

'Tis so! To such conclusion all things school
The heart and brain.
Then wherefore trembling tread the vestibule
Of life's great fane?

Father! for joy thou hast created me—
A boundless store!
Oh, what a wondrous gift it is to be!
Then how much more

To know, and love—upon Thy breast to lean—
Heavenward to tend!
Oh, take from me whate'er may contravene
Life's nobler end!

True, I am nothing; still, I am Thy child.
Oh, if that name
To Thee be dear, teach me how best to build
Towards Thee my aim!

All, that I want or ask, is to be clad
In thy control.
Evolve the good, precipitate the bad
Within my soul!

Oh, hide my errors . . . from Thyself the most!
One hath sufficed
To please Thee. May in Him my sins be lost!
View me in Christ—

Pure pattern of sublime humanity,
Thy own dear Son,
Who in Thy bosom dwells, and is with Thee
In spirit One!

I think on Him ! And dared I then complain ?
Him Thou hast given
To purchase man unto Thyself again,
The only Heaven !

Him Thou hast given — at what a costly price —
Our joy to make !
Ah, who can tell what Thou didst sacrifice
For our poor sake ?

Away, then, grief. Away, suspicion rude !
All doubts I hush :
Father ! a flood of joy and gratitude
Doth o'er me gush.

Thou lovest to look on happiness : that feast
Is now my part ;
Let others murmur, Thou shalt see at least
One thankful heart !

Though all the world thy dread mysterious ways
With doubt should scan,
One mind shall yet behold, throughout the maze,
A loving plan.

And, oh, to all be soon Thy love confest,
Thy bounty known,
Melting with happiness each sullen breast
Thou look'st upon !

Speed the glad hour when in Thee every soul
Its joy shall find:
Oh, could my feeble prayer embrace the whole
Of human-kind !

FAITH'S ARCHITECTURE.

1.

O TRUTHFUL mind, look largely round
The realm of thought, through form and sect,
The palace of thy Faith to found,
And be thyself the architect.

2.

'Tis master-work first stones to place !
Scorn stately towers and roofs of gold,
That totter on a trembling base,
Probe all foundations, new and old.

3.

Turn'st thou to miracle thy ken
For firm domain? That sandy shore
Sinks the firm footstep. Leave it then
To alchemist and conjurer !

4.

That base hath dreary consequence
To present hours. By broken laws
Thou turn'st away thy nobler sense
From order, and from order's Cause.

5.

If God is wavering, thou art weak :
If thou but deem one grain of dust
Unstable, vainly shalt thou seek
Repose : thy being breeds distrust.

6.

Go, shudder at a magpie's flight,
At the spilt salt, or morning dream !
If wonder rules, thou'rt in the right ;
The fount is troubled : dark the stream.

7.

Yet follow not the drier tribe,
Who cut e'en God to their own curve ;
The paths that wandering stars describe,
Admit them, they but seem to swerve.

8.

Since miracle thine eye beholds
At every step, thou shalt do well
This to believe, that Nature folds
Within herself all miracle.

9.

The common walk of daily life
Contents her not. She hath the power
To start into majestic strife,
And rise in some sublimer hour.

10.

“ Experience is the surest ground : ”
This maxim of an outworn school
In some old task-book thou hast found ;
But work not thou with this blind tool !

11.


For forty years, in faith compact,
Experience-taught, thou may'st build on,
When in thy face laughs some new fact,
And pushes thy poor card-house down.

12.

Or wilt thou forfeit Reason's right,
Quench thy great instinct to infer,
And be that thing of noonday night,
A positive philosopher ? —

13.

Then find that, in thy own despite,
Thy spirit bursts its narrow cell,
And plant-like, struggles to the light
That shrouds the great Invisible !



14.

Or half-philosopher art thou,
Whose voice in hollow murmurs saith,
“Religion’s mysteries, we know,
Are not for Reason, but for Faith ;

15.

“So must they man’s perception balk ;
Left, or believed.” Then fades thy sense
To something of a mutter’d talk
Of veiled eyes, and reverence.

16.

Ha ! art thou honest ? Quit the camp,
Which, by thy presence, is less strong !
Thou rotten friend ! A nobler stamp
Has he who boldly offers wrong.

17.

But thou, perhaps, a feeble soul,
No mansion for thyself wilt build ;
“ ’Tis safer,” say’st thou, “ to enrol
Myself in some fraternal guild :

18.

“ Now, in my singleness, I reel
All ways ; through numbers I may stand :
My conscience shakes ; methinks ’twould feel
More easy in another’s hand.

19.

"A body, and a master strong
Is what I seek." Friend, thou may'st be
Soon suited! Hark! A syren song
Authority is singing thee!

20.

"Come, burthen'd one," she murmurs, "come!
Repose on me thy hopes and fears;
I take the terror from the tomb,
I wipe away thy long arrears!"

21.


Shall such sweet accents thee befool?
Ah, shuddering fly that voice accurst!
They who aspire the mind to rule,
Of rulers are the very worst!

22.

Or art thou one, less given to lurch,
Who, sitting in thy own snug nook,
Smilest at the votary of a church
To pin thy faith upon a Book?

23.

A Church? a Book? what matters it?
Well, if thy spirit downward cleaves,
Find for thy Book a shrine that's fit,
And bind up God between the leaves!



24.

But, if thou holdèst Reason's crown
Too dear to be in dust down-trod,
Serenely from thy shelf take down
The Book, not vainly, call'd of God !

25.

The Book was writ to make thee think.
'Twill aid thee ! Study well its lore !
If from its awe thou dost not shrink,
Thou wilt behold its beauty more.

26.

The scenery of the Book is grand.
God, and His Son, the lamp-like row
Of Seraphim—the Demon-band—
Its actors are. But calmly go

27.

Through these great shadows. What are they ?
Dead forms, that wait thy kindling will,
Pale outlines, hints of coming day,
Which thou with life and truth must fill.

28.

Accept, reject, weigh, doubt, decide,
Find out thy fitting nutriment,
Here as elsewhere. Boldly divide
The transient from the permanent.

29.

Dwell not in outward ; let the dower
Within thee circle strong and free :
Imagination is the power
That best shall build Reality.

30.

Against thyself it is a sin
To rest in outer sense or sound.
What canst thou from externals win ?
All is but type in the great round

31.

Of life. The forest's leafy scroll
Is but thine eyebeam's poësy :
The sky's deep blue is in thy soul ;
All Nature is God's speech to thee.

32.

From clouds that race along the meadow,
To Christ expiring on the Cross,
All but the eternal mind is shadow,
Which, if thou grasp, thou gainest loss.

33.

Slave of the sensual eye, break off
Thy bonds ; be master of thine ear !
Thy inner scope is large enough
If thou desert life's outer sphere.

And see thy mother face to face !

35.

Be calm, till thou a mirror grow,
Which glasses all things, true and warm ;
Gaze into depths, which bravely show
Space but a shadow, time a form !

36.

The tree with the forbidden fruit,
The penalty, the fall, the rise
Are idle tales, unless thou suit
The inner truth to the disguise.

37.

If in thyself Titanic war,
Abysmal evil thou espy,
Satan and Hell more real are
Than if thou saw'st them with thine eye.

39.

Faith's lawyer art thou? poring over
Great loads of lumpy evidence,
Thinking the Gospels to discover
By tracking them through mood and tense?

40.

Trust rather years past over thee,
Rest on convictions wrought from pain,
Consult thy inner history ;
That evidence shall not be vain.

41.

If fail all other, heave no sighs !
What falls was weak before it fell.
Words—names—that seem to make men wise,
But keep them ignorant, weigh them well.

42.

While some of Inspiration talk,
Ask what it means. Is Scripture hurl'd
To awe thee? The loud effort balk
By that which is within thee furl'd,

43.

A scripture which all books would rend,
And burst from out their envelopes
With its God-greatness. Wilt thou mend
Thy arteries with rotten ropes?

44.

Think not the world is overthrown,
When snap old trusts like willow-withe,
Thy grasp betraying. Freely own
All History shakes hands with Myth :

45.

That Newton knew than Joshua more
The mazy motion of the spheres,
And Moses' geologic lore
Was not so sound as Conybeare's.

46.

If thou by beauty's road arrive
At the transcendence of thy plan,
Why should not e'en thy Faith survive
The finding of a fossil man ?

47.

Hegel hath not put out the stars
With any arrow from his quiver ;
Strauss with our old instruction jars,
But violets are as sweet as ever.

48.

And lives and blooms the Sacred Book.
Its stately records, wonder-rife,
As outer shadows may be shook,
But not as deeds of inner life.

49.

Yet fret not if the truths you scan
Others with other eyes behold;
'Twere poor to narrow the great plan,
Whose charm is to be manifold.

50.

Bear with what seems to thee defect
In other men. It were their loss
Perhaps could you their faults correct,
Or far away their follies toss.

51.

What is absurdity to me
May be your linchpin. Draw it out,
You fall in pieces. It may be
Your very creed subsists by doubt.

52.

A Christian's name to disavow
May keep you in the path of Christ;
Perhaps a holy Atheist thou,
Perhaps a righteous Fatalist.

53.

And Destiny her web may spin
With no blind aim thy view before;
And thou may'st see God causing sin,
Yet only honour God the more.

54.

These forms of mind are plain to sense ;
But under this diversity
Plunge deep. Allow for difference,
Yet find the ground where all agree.

55.

Great thoughts are brothers. We but fight
For dreams. Our blood doth equal run.
Our fancies war ; our hearts unite ;
The sects are many — man is one.

56.

Why still so lorn and dead within ?
Of lordly structures why so void ?
Ah, when true work we would begin,
So much has first to be destroy'd !

57.

Mean huts upraised without our will,
While Reason slept — wells overgrown
With weeds — dark clefts, ghost-haunted still,
These must be levell'd ! To pull down

58.

Is half the toil of building up.
Hard task ! yet bravely set thy hand
To this large labour of thy hope,
Make clear and fair the inner land.

59.

Reach back beyond thy nurse's lore
To God's own teaching undefiled,
And, when thou art thy own once more,
And free and fearless as a child,

60.

Seek thy lone study. . . . No ! Go forth !
Wander by river and by field,
Set thy firm foot upon the earth ;
Have heaven above thy head then build !

61.

Build ? I was wrong ! Ah futile strife !
Say rather, breathe ! Task all thy dowers
To turn thought, wisdom, into life,
As air is turn'd to leaves and flowers !

62.

Too much self-conscious art doth lurk
About our joys, within our souls ;
The coral-worms but blindly work,
And yet they form harmonious wholes.

63.

Reviewing old, constructing new,
So pass we time. Yet why ? Our way
Is bright : the buds are young with dew :
Be wiser ! Live and love to-day !

64.

Let past be past. Freshly the gale
Sweeps by! New-born the light doth flow
About thy forehead! What avail
The sunbeams of an hour ago?

65.

The children gathering yellow stars
About the mead; the clown, whose brow
No furrow of reflection mars,
All things that grasp this actual Now

66.

Shall be thy teachers. Blend with them!
Put off thy sapless subtleties,
Which stand aloof with rootless stem,
To be a part of all that is.

67.

Live, grow, let dead things fall from thee:
Fast as they fall new growth receive!
All change is not apostasy;
To live is more than to believe.

68.

If to mere forms thou fade and pass,
At thee the flowers shall laugh their fill,
And every little blade of grass
Upbraid thee with its depth of will.

69.

Art thou a man in very deed ?
The Creed that must thy mind control
Can all things be, except the Creed
Of any other human soul.

70.

For in thy Creed there should be furl'd
God's work, from which there's no retreating,
Thy place in this great moving world,
Thy heart, whose law is to be beating.

71.

In some great hour of quiet sight
Behold this. Find thy work to do.
Choose in God's eye thy place aright :
Then God's own truth shall make thee true.

SUNDAY.

LITTLE boys in the boat, on the lake afloat,
This beautiful Sunday morn ;
Ye gay little boys, with your mirth and noise,
I cannot over you mourn.

I cannot say, "It is Sabbath-day ;
You are doing a wicked thing :"
The sun is so bright, there's so much delight,
And so merrily comes the spring !

Every bird strains its throat with a gleeful note,
Not a creature looks sad or coy ;
Waves dance on the deeps ; all Nature keeps
Her Sabbath in laughter and joy.

And ye, young things, in whom merriment springs,
Is this word too rashly hurl'd ?
Your voices clear God loves to hear
Join the chorus of mirth in the world.

Now, which is worse, and who hath the curse,
You, or the Pharisee,
Who groans with distress o'er Earth's wickedness,
Where none are so good as he ?

And which doth dart just that thrill to the heart,
Which most thanks to God doth bear ;
To rejoice in the mirth of this bountiful earth,
Or to look for the wickedness there ?

In the Gospel we read, he is good indeed
Who is meek and humble shown ;
But he who begins by other men's sins,
Thinks but little of his own.

"REDEEMING THE TIME."

THE CLOCK.

ONCE on a time I saw a clock,
A clock of mighty span,
Whose hour-hand was contrived to mock
The figure of a man ;

A man of man's own natural size :
There, on the great Church-tower,
This figure's arm, in upstretch'd wise,
Still pointed to the hour.

That night a dreadful dream to me
My fancy did unlock :
'Twas I myself appear'd to be
The hour-hand of the clock.

And a voice said, "Behold thy hell
For time misused by thee :
To others thou the time must tell
For everlastingly !"

And there I was ; from head to heel
Incapable to swerve ;
An iron man, that yet could feel
The thrill of human nerve.

All contrasts horrible and drear
In me were native grown :
Stirless myself, I yet must stir
By motion not my own !

My heart wept blood ; but from my eye
No tear could be express'd :
How groan'd my soul, while not a sigh
Relieved my weary breast !

To move is still a very gain,
Though on a narrow shelf ;
But I was prison'd in my pain :
My dungeon was myself.

Face-downward, fix'd in loathing hate,
With eyes that would not shut,
Upon the cold smooth dial-plate
My aching gaze I glut.

Oh, that slow agony of sight,
It was a ghastly boon!
I saw my shadow night by night
Beneath the icy moon.

The dews fell rusting round my head,
Each drop an agony,
And sometimes pitch-black darkness spread
About me utterly.

And still through all, and under all,
With intermittent shock,
One sound upon my brain did fall—
The ticking of the clock.

Seasons above me cross'd and cross'd
With unrelenting feet;
Now did I know the hell of frost,
And now of scorching heat.

The climax of the summer-ray
Fierce up to noontide stole;
The winter's snow upon me lay,
And froze my very soul.

The storm about me raved and dash'd,
Yet made me not more free,
And the fierce lightning through me flash'd
Electric agony.

Yet in this hell there was a worse :
'Twas when the vernal air
Breathed soft, and round me brought the curse
Of joys I could not share ;

When the first swallows in the eaves
Were twittering merrily,
And I could hear the rustling leaves
Of a rejoicing tree ;

When all the town came out to quaff
At eve a common joy ;
Then what a sting was in the laugh
Of merry girl and boy !

And days, and weeks, and months, and years
I ended and begun,
And revolutions of the spheres,
And cycles of the sun.

Strange instincts glimmer'd from afar,
And, sightless, I could trace
That, since I slept, the Polar Star
Itself had changed its place.


And ever, ever was I bound
To that slow path of mine ;
So slow, the everlasting round
Seem'd but an endless line.

Oh, many an awful dream to me
Has come with spirit-shock,
But none with such an agony
As of the old town-clock !

And joys I've known ; yet none whose beam
Could so my soul illumine
As when I started from that dream,
And saw my quiet room !

ELECTION.

PART of a plan we are. Remember this !
Nor ask why fall the lots of bale and bliss
Unequally ;—Why thou art in the shade,
Another in the sunshine. Nor upbraid
Him who weighs all, if in this world prevails
No balance, but the trembling of the scales.
Election ! So it must be for a time !
Some are elect to goodness—some to crime—
Some to hard couches, some to beds of down,
One to a dunghill, one unto a crown—
All to God's Love ! And, since God loveth all,
If here thou seest some only fed on gall,
Be sure hereafter these Love's lot will draw ;
There's time enough to work out equal law.
God is not press'd for space ! Forget not He
Hath, for His working-room, Eternity !
So Earth's defects, and all that's wanting here
Shall be made perfect in another sphere.
Chosen shall be what God did first reject,
Till all shall be to happiness elect.



A DEDUCTION.

1.

PRY is strong within the noble mind,
Which lets the weak, whom it could crush prevail.
God in this strife will not be left behind,
But doth weak man with generous love assail.
So all things lie—around—below—above,
Not at His mercy, but within His love.

2.

Christ did of His disciples wash the feet ;
Christ said, " Who seeth Me, the Father sees !"
This lesson is with wondrous things replete :
Our Lord to us hath been upon His knees ;
And we behold, as in a mirror broad,
That God serves man much more than man serves God.

THE USE OF SORROW.

THERE'S not a grief but serves to teach
Truths needful to our span ;
There's not a loss that does not preach
Some lofty gain to man.

Evening might seem to common view
The shroud of Day's great dower,
But, under her sweet veil, the dew
Refreshes herb and flower.

And purifying are the shocks
Of mortal pain and woe ;
The stream that dashes on the rocks
Rebounds as white as snow.


Then deem not thou that God in vain
The human heart would pierce ;
One needless grief, one useless pain
Would sink the universe.

So didst thou tremble into Youth ;
And something had thy beauty caught
Of earnest Manhood's firmer thought :
Thine eyes were full of love and truth ;
Thy forehead pure this frontlet show'd—
"Fidelity and Faith in God !"

Oh, then I lived but in thy sight ;
Made strong in thee great acts I did !
When, lo, a sudden chillness slid
Upon thee ; an untimely blight ;
And thou art dead ; and in thy pall
Art carried out to burial.

But, Saviour, though my Hope is dead,
Thou livest, and may'st the funeral meet
Winding its way through gate and street,
And o'er it Thy compassion shed
Ere yet it reach the churchyard plot,
And to my spirit say, " Weep not !"

And cry to my dead Hope, " Arise !"
So shall it once more breathe and speak,
And have life's hues upon its cheek,
And lustre in its faded eyes ;
And live again, my joy to be,
No more to die, except with me !



THE CROSS.

LIFE is full of ugly crosses,
Black vexations, pains, and losses,
So that to us the Cross is shown
Not on Gethsemane alone,
But darkly traced on everything;
Most upon our own sad heart.
Yet away with murmuring!
Christ can bid the gloom depart.
If He, with His radiant finger,
Where the deepest shadows linger,
Draw but one bright line athwart
Any Cross that us doth mar,
Lo! the Cross becomes a star!

“ A SAVIOUR, WHO IS CHRIST ! ”

SAVIOUR, save us from ourselves !
Wreck'd we are on life's rude shelves ;
Many a trial from without
Breeds in us dismay and doubt ;
But the warfare and the sin
Are concentrated within :
Save us from ourselves !

God is good : — but our own cloud
Doth His goodness overshroud.
We are evil : — that doth make
Appearances an ill shape take :
All the great Creator's plan
In our own defect we scan :
Save us from ourselves !

Save us from our own sick brain,
From Imagination's pain ;
Satan and his gloomy court,
That with our weak senses sport ;

So he left, with a bosom of sore distress,
The ninety and nine in the wilderness,
And climb'd over rocks all ruggedly tost,
To seek and to save the sheep that was lost.


And, when he had found it in pitfall deep,
On his shoulders rejoicing he laid the sheep;
And he call'd to his neighbours and friends around,
“ Rejoice with me, for the lost is found ! ”

Ten pieces of silver—a hundred sheep !
These parables have a meaning deep !
So many there were ; and (oh, comfort sweet !)
Still in the end was the number complete.

This showeth us that our Father true,
Who numbers the sparrows, doth number us too :
That not one can be lost of human kind,
Because all dwell in God's heart and mind.

And which are the just, and who is the waif ?
The first are the sinners who think themselves safe,
And he is the wandering sheep of the clan
Who errs and feels like a sinful man.

God seeketh for him, not as lost alone,
But because he was ever a loving one ;
While the cold ones are left, a satisfied race,
In the wilderness as their fittest place.



And surely there is more joy in heaven
Over those God absolves than the self-forgiven !
Thou righteous one, with the hard cold eyes,
What business hast thou in the tender skies ?

Would'st thou sit down with the penitent thief,
Or the sinful woman who once had grief ?
Would'st thou believe e'en David might be,
Singing in heaven, meet comrade for thee ?

Now is my spirit in deep thoughts drown'd ; . . .
Not, indeed, that the lost are found :
My wonder is that the ninety and nine
Ever arrive at the realms divine.

THE JUDGMENT-DAY.

Oh, vulgar eye, that, in the terrors dim
Wherewith our Christ the Conscience doth array,
Sees but the trumpets and the Seraphim,

And physical pageant of a Judgment-day !
The conscious inner soul, from this film free,
Sweeps, calmly smiling, that large pomp away,

And says, " When I have judg'd myself shall be
The Judgment-day ! What are the falling rocks
Or stars faint-reeling from their thrones to *me* ?

" One whisper of my own alone unlocks
My awe, my penitence, my tender tear.
I am impregnable to outward shocks ;

"E'en the Almighty, with His worst of fear,
Is but the Lord of my external sense:
Unto my inner realm He comes not near,

"Nor reaches me by haughty violence.
Me can He only vanquish by His love,
And I should laugh at mere Omnipotence

"That thunders at me, as it sits above,
Yet is below me: for more great am I,
Whom passion stains not, than an angry Jove

"Who only rules because He keeps the sky.
But, oh!" (thus Consciousness might onward urge
Her deeper speech) "Thou true Supremacy,

"Forgive me, God, that I such fancies forge,
Likening Thee to that false thing—the bigot's dream!
I do not touch Thee with my thought's vain surge

"More than the wave puts out the solar beam!
Thee I offend not; for these thoughts of mine,
This love of justice, and this hate supreme

"Of vulgar tyranny, not less are Thine
Than my own appanage! Thou framedst me so
Out of Thyself—of Thee a part divine—

"Thee by my higher self I inly know;
And feel that Thou dost judge, condemn, acquit
By my convictions only!" Thus far go

The words which to man's consciousness I fit.
And now unto the parable I turn,
Which sent this biting summons to my wit,

The Judgment-day—th' immitigable urn,
The wicked sever'd from amongst the just:
The spirit of this pomp I would discern,

And far away the unspiritual letter thrust,
Useless, when it—the seed's rude envelope—
Hath let the germ, which Christ did to it trust,

Burst in the soil of our immortal hope,
And with our fix'd idea interlink
Blossom and tendril. Look unto the scope

Of this great parable, that doth hoodwink
Love by apparent Fear. "I thirsted," said
The Saviour, "and ye never gave me drink;

"I was upon the bed of sickness laid—
In prison—and ye did not visit Me!
Oh, no! You only, in your pride array'd,

“ Sat upon judgment-seats, whence boldly ye
Condemn'd your brother for some sin less great
Than your own hardness. Now behold, and see

“ The face of things reversed ! For you begin
The tortures of self-knowledge ; while the Poor,
Whom ye opprest, an inner glory win

“ From things that in their doom were once obscure,
From humbleness and love ! ” So far, indeed,
The Son of God hath made His meaning sure ;

But He within us other thoughts doth breed,
Which I would fain translate ; still borrowing
The voice of Christ to fit the occasion's need,

And imping high Imagination's wing
By Gospel-truth. Thus, then, His general aim
Might Christ before unloving spirits bring.

“ My Judgment-day, O man, is but a frame
To My great principle — immortal Love —
Which is the Godhead's truest, dearest Name !

“ I said, Love was the Law, all laws above.
Think you, in the last day, I falsify
My teaching, and my very Self reprove ?

"No! By all awe, all power, all pageantry,
I seek to burn the lesson into you,
And fuse the rock of your obduracy!

"I set your own Gehenna in your view,
Whose fires may tame you by brute punishment.
Correction's meaning never yet ye knew,

"But did the dungeon and the lash invent:
Then be they yours! Base things unto the base!
Take to yourselves each torturing instrument!

"Go to the left—to the dishonour'd place—
Go! till Æonian ages have roll'd o'er
Your heads; and learn by your own piteous case

"To feel for others! Then, if in the core
Of your dark hearts burns yet one glowing spot,
One little space, where God was writ of yore,

"Then may you melt, and know that I am not,
Ye loveless ones, like *you*. But come with Me,
Ye blessed of my Father, unforgot

"Through the long toil of earthly misery;
Ye loving hearts, with Me for ever dwell,
For ye are Mine by strong affinity!"
This is the meaning of the Parable.

NO HIRELING.

THERE was a man, both poor and brave,
 Who dwelt by the sea-coast :
His life he perill'd lives to save
 Whene'er a ship was lost.

Full many a one who never thought
 To see his home again,
Through plunging waves to land he brought
 Out of the raging main.

And many a child he held aloft
 Till safe from ocean's harms ;
And mothers he restored oft
 Unto their husbands' arms.


But, though his strength was tried and spent
 With billows struggling hard,
With human thanks he was content :
 He never took reward !

And so upon his board were set
Nor silver cup nor plate :
But, when he died, an Angel met
His spirit at God's gate.

CONTRAST.

FRET not thou that God has given
To the world such tints of woe !
In the plan, and in the beauty
Of the plan, it must be so !

Ah, if even earthly pleasure
Owes its light to past annoy,
Dark indeed must be the shadow
That prepares eternal joy !



JOHN AND THE BIBLE.

“TURN the Bible topsy-turvy?
'Tis a trick profane and scurvy!
John, I am ashamed of you!
You, a pious Christian too!
Rather place upon my shelves
All my octaves and my twelves
Upside down, than so to libel
Your religion, and my Bible!”
Then John, who's a clever varlet,
Thus excused his crime so scarlet.
“No offence, Sir! but I think
Many on my fault might wink.
Parsons making crimes on Sunday
That are no crimes on the Monday;
Rectors, who are fed on haunches,
Bishops, with their goodly paunches;
Mistress Jones, as meek as pigeon,
Tearing Mistress Smith's religion;

Mister Mogg, who does so crack
He never touch'd of cards a pack,
Yet slanders you behind your back ;
These might think me extra good,
Only of their brotherhood,
When I, in a study brown,
Turn the Bible upside-down."

TOLERATION.

WHERE lies the East ? Morn's kindling robe
Creates that point alone.
Chase the glad Orient round the globe,
Each country hath its own.

Learn hence with what a various glance
Truth meets each several ken :
What's East to thee may be perchance,
The West of other men.

THE NIGHTINGALE AND THE THORN.

'Tis a legend round Memory clinging,
And I'll tell you what it means,
That the Nightingale when singing
On a thorn her bosom leans.

The Nightingale is a spirit
Who singeth the livelong night,
Because her eye doth inherit
In darkness the truest light.

The thorn, 'tis to remind her
Of the world, and all its woe,
Lest her song too deeply bind her
To the passionate things below.

That thorn—oh she flies not from it!
By herself 'tis willingly prest:
She would not to nothingness doom it,
But buries it more in her breast.

That thorn—there's a flower it beareth
Which no eye but hers can explore,
Which within her bosom weareth
Its loveliness evermore.

Were she such strains outpouring
Till the night-star fades in the morn,
Were her song so upward soaring
If it were not for that thorn?

O God, when in earthly pleasure
Yearning I feel forlorn,
May I that sorrow treasure,
Press to my bosom that thorn!

SONNET.

THE God of sorrow is the only God.
Our Christ has suffer'd! There is the respect
That binds us to Him! Gods in glory deckt
Are nothing: He the path of pain has trod
Which we are treading. Over flint and clod—
Not over lawns with flowery beauty fleckt—
His path was: He was not of the Elect
Who sit, each armèd with a golden rod
To smite the sinner. Yet the self-applauders
Have perk'd up Sorrow's Christ on their own throne,
And rush'd into His realm, mere false marauders,
And given Him scorpion whips: while He, alone
With human grief, supports some drooping head,
Or smooths with gentle hand some dying sufferer's bed.

THE SINNER'S CONFESSION.

I HAD no joy ! The sinful Past
Was near me night and day ;
Darkness and storm were round me cast ;
I had no heart to pray.

I had no rest. My wild thoughts knew
Nor pause, nor guiding Will :—
Enormous woe, that ever grew
To vaster forms of ill !

I had no hope : not more that his
Whose bark is swept from shore,
And nears a hideous precipice
Where headlong waters roar.

I could not weep : still raged in me
The agony that sears
The very brain : and can there be
Repentance without tears ?

Help seemed there none: when to my soul
A faint, faint whisper came:
Yet sweet. Methought a sound it stole
Like to a Saviour's name!

Then gradual by a rising beam
The darkness was withdrawn:
Is it the Dawn, or meteor's gleam?
It is—it is—the Dawn!

It was Thyself, O gracious Lord,
Didst deign to look on me;
And to my spirit joy afford
In its great agony!

It was Thy Spirit moved upon
The troubled waters' face:
It was Thy heavenly light that shone
The night of Hell to chase.

For me new Hope Thou bad'st to spring,
Mad'st prayer my glad employ:
The very rod of chastening
Did blossom into joy.

Thou gavest me Faith, that heaven-stored gem,
Which never can be lost:
Tears—contrite tears—thou gavest them!
For that I love Thee most!

GENNESARET.

THE ship was toiling on the sea where night and storm had met
About the waters and the shores of lone Gennesaret,
The sad disciples of our Lord with fainting hearts did stem
The adverse waves; they fear'd the blast—for Christ was not
with them.

Sudden towards their tossing bark a form of terror sped,
That walk'd upon the billows wild: they crièd out for dread.
“It is a spirit!” said they all. “Alas, we soon must die!”
When came to them Christ's well-known voice—“Be of good
cheer—'tis I!”

O Saviour, thus on life's rude deep, amidst affliction's war,
We toss in terrors worse than grief, and deem all comfort far;
But, when we think some wildest form of dread is drawing
nigh,
Then comes Thy voice upon the wave—“Be not afraid—
'tis I!”

THE BINDWEED AND THE CORN.

I SAW the bindweed twining round the corn,
And from that sight a thousand thoughts were born.
Graceful the bindweed look'd, although a weed,
Precious for ornament, if not for need.
The strong tall stalk how lovingly it clad !
And of its comrade did the stalk seem glad ;
Ay, proud of the pink almond-smelling flowers
Whose drooping urns might serve for fairies' bowers.
Yet, said I, men will part these comrades twain,
And cry, " the weed doth spoil the precious grain !"
Will throw the weed away to fade and die,
But lay the grain in precious garner by :
" And yet God is," I cried with voice forlorn,
" God of the weed not less than of the corn !"

TRUST.

I SAT upon an Alpine height,
Whence I could see and hear
A traveller on a dizzy path,
Who crept, and shook with fear,
And eyed the dreadful precipice
To which his path was near.

And well the traveller, though bold,
Upon that ledge might shrink ;
Right down below his very feet
The gaping gulf did sink :
The path was but a thread, and near'd
Each moment more the brink.

His fearless guide beheld the man,
And said, " This path will go
For a long time thus dizzily,
Or worse ;—for you may throw
Soon from your outstretch'd hand a stone
Three thousand feet below.

“ I see you are no mountaineer,
I see your head doth swim,
And I must for your safety care
Upon this mountain’s brim.
If any guide his charge should lose,
O woe indeed to him !

“ Take my advice, and let me bind
Your eyes, lest you should see
The further perils of the way ;
I’ll lead you warily !
I answer for your life with mine —
Now give your hand to me !”

Then I saw how the traveller
Stood like a little child,
And let the other blindfold him
Upon the mountain wild.
Led by the guide he, round the gulf,
Then trustfully defiled.


To know how guide and man would fare
I follow’d—for I knew
The mountain well—and came again
Upon the wanderers two,
Where Italy, the beautiful,
Burst nobly on the view.

So I beheld the careful pair
 Reach now a broader road ;
The Guide then took the bandage off,
 And to the stranger show'd
That all was safe, and how the plains
 Beneath them gleam'd and glow'd.

You should have seen the traveller's face,
 The mingled feelings cast
Upon that tablet of his mind :
 He eyed the prospect vast,
And yet he gave a furtive glance
 Unto the danger past !

And I could see remember'd fear
 Made safety more excel.
Grateful upon the guide he look'd
 And said, " You've led me well !"
And I could fancy that his eye
 Some deeper thoughts did tell.

Or haply my own bosom said,
 " My path of life, like this,
Oft leads my frail uncertain feet
 Along a precipice.
How oft my dizzy brain must reel
 While coasting an abyss !




“ But there’s a Guide that’s always near,
Wherever man hath trod,
Who sees for me, when I myself
Dare look not on the road.
Fear not, my soul, God leadeth thee!
Then blindfold follow God !”

THE BIRDS.

Be not alarm'd: I wish you well,
Ye little birds, that fly away
When I upon the window-sill
Scatter the crumbs this winter-day.
I do not lure you to betray:
Then why so wildly flutter hence?
Alas! our different natures say
We cannot meet in confidence!

From things above, and things below
By unseen walls we parted are:
A sad experience bids us know
The near is distant as the far.
With God and with His works we jar
From want of mere similitude,
And this it is which makes the war
Of our humanity so rude.



'Tis thus we fear when we should trust ;
 'Tis thus we start at every sound
And shadow, which our trembling dust
 With love and beauty doth surround.
And how shall God o'erpass this mound ?
How soothe our hearts that tremble thus ?
 E'en sovereign power here finds a bound :
A different language severs us !

As I with yonder timid birds :
 I throw the crumbs—I stand aside—
So the great Giver checks His words
 To those for whom His deeds provide :
 He seeks His loving face to hide
Lest we with mere surprise rebel ;
 Yet float sweet accents far and wide,
“ Be not alarm'd—I wish you well ! ”

“HE CALLETH THEE!”

He calleth thee from field or mart,
The city or the lea ;
In life's great round, where'er thou art,
O man, He calleth Thee !

If but one beam from those pure eyes
Should fall, however dim,
Upon thy clay, thou must arise,
Leave all, and follow Him.

Look round, look round, how wide reveal'd
Upon thy left, thy right,
Gaze where thou wilt, a noble field
Of labour meets thy sight !

Fear'st thou thy sphere may be but small?
That petty thought o'erleap !
If some small good were done by all,
How shrunk were evil's heap !

There's work for thee—the work of Heaven!
Awake, and do its will!
If only thou for self hast striven,
Thou hast been idle still!

A THOUGHT.

IN His own image God created man!
So Scripture runs. . . . But, by the bigot's nod
And prompt reversal of our Father's plan,
In his own image man created God.

THE TRUE VOICE.*

VOICES so many haunt me on my road,
O, tell me, Angel, which the voice of God?
“ ’Tis that which most relieves thee of thy load.”

Yet to me, Angel, oft it doth appear
As if His voice were terrible to hear.
“ That is thy own defect, and sin-born fear.”

And oft about me is a voice at eve,
Which tells me that for ever I shall grieve.
“ That God hath such a voice, dare not believe.”

Yet sometimes, too, at eve, ill voices die,
And comes a whisper of tranquillity.
“ His voice is speaking in that evening sigh.”

And sometimes round me sweetest murmurs sing,
There is a happy end for everything!
“ That is Heaven’s chorus earthward echoing.”

* Inserted in “ Household Words,” vol. x. p. 84.

REMEDY.*

I WAS drooping, I was grieving,
O'er life's ills, a hideous train ;
All, I said, is but bereaving ;
All is loss without a gain !

There is not one stable blessing
For our weak and sinful clay ;
In the moment of possessing
Every joy is snatch'd away !

Suddenly there came a splendour
Richly gushing from the skies ;
As a Maiden, bright yet tender,
Stream'd upon my wondering eyes.

" Cease," she said, " thy strain of sorrow ;
Mortal, turn thy looks on me :
I am daughter of To-morrow,
And my name is Remedy !

* Inserted in " Household Words," vol. x. p. 132.

“Nothing is, that is without me ;
I was present at the birth
Of the Universe about me ;
Mine is Heaven ; mine is Earth !”

“Sphere,” I cried, “sublime of action !
Yet a doubt suspends my breath :
For disgrace, despair, distraction,
What thy cure ?” She answer’d, “Death !”

“That,” I cried with bitter feeling,
“Is from woe to woe to flee.
Say, for death itself what healing ?”
She replied, “Eternity !”

WORK FOR HEAVEN.*

If thou have thrown a glorious thought
Upon life's common ways,
Should other men the gain have caught,
Fret not to lose the praise.

Great thinker, often shalt thou find,
While folly plunders fame,
To thy rich store the crowd is blind,
Nor knows thy very name.

What matter that, if thou uncoil
The soul that God has given;
Not in the world's mean eye to toil,
But in the sight of Heaven?

If thou art true, yet in thee lurks
For fame a human sigh,
To Nature go, and see how works
That handmaid of the sky!

* Inserted in "Household Words," vol. xii. p. 396.

Her own deep bounty, she forgets,
Is full of germs and seeds;
Nor glorifies herself, nor sets
Her flowers above her weeds.

She hides the modest leaves between,
She loves untrodden roads;
Her richest treasures are not seen
By any eye but God's.

Accept the lesson. Look not for
Reward; from out thee chase
All selfish ends, and ask no more
Than to fulfil thy place.

EVENING CLOUDS.

I WOULD my thoughts were like yon clouds
That now, at close of day,
To glory turn their dusky shrouds,
And catch the parting ray !

Above the west they hover bright.
Their host to fancy brings
Thousands of angels that catch light
Upon their inner wings.

So to my darkness and my dearth
O God, thy smile be given,
Which, as the splendour fades from earth,
Transfers it more to heaven !

THOUGHTS SUGGESTED BY A PUBLIC THANKS-
GIVING FOR A PLENTIFUL HARVEST.*

THANKSGIVING for the harvest!—It is meet—
And Praise is dear, and grateful songs are sweet,
And God Himself may feel Joy's added zest
To hear His creatures own that they are blest.
But yet a loud astonishment that God
Feeds those He made, and pours His gifts abroad
Lavishly sometimes—might appear to be
A praise that wrongs abundant Deity.
Not when He gives alone should God be seen
With something better than a wrathful mien :
Ah, only just and loving are those eyes
That sees the Father most when he *denies* !
A broader view would prompt Thanksgiving still,
Though Famine vexed us, and all forms of ill :
Too largely worketh Providence to be
The little special thing that some men see :
The Everlasting Father is o'er all,
And not a blessing is exceptional.

* These lines have appeared in the Examiner.

And must we, then, towards Providence employ
A sullen silence or a clamorous joy ?
Alas we prove by this restricted praise
Our thoughts of God are those the *Savage* has,
Who, as a forfeit or a gift he scores,
Alternate whips his idols, or adores.

Oh poor and earthly reasoning, whose crude leaven
Turns Gratitude into a bribe to Heaven,
And makes the prayer that rings at harvest home
A lively sense of favours yet to come !
Better the long procession and gay cheer
Which blesses Roman corn-fields year by year,
And the same song sends up with merry din
For *every* harvest whether full or thin.
Never be ours the poor content that draws
Omens particular from general laws.

But do I coldly, when our mortal days
Boast rarer blessings, scoff at warmer praise ?
Would I restrain the heavenward prayer ? Oh no !
When pleasures largely come, let rapture flow
As largely too—because God meant it so :
Haply for this He sometimes stints His hand
To make us glad when Plenty crowns the land.
Abundance always no abundance were,
Nor joy ev'n joy without the shade of care.
As we in grief a trustful seriousness
Should wear,—so, when great joys our griefs redress,
'Tis meet we answer Heaven's full-swelling tide
Of bounty by a happiness as wide.

Then in this harvest-time, ye crowds, rejoice,
Throw wide the temple gates—uplift the voice.
Only beware lest, when from Church you wind,
You leave your grace and gratitude behind.
Nor let the rich abundance curse your door;
Take care this be a harvest for the Poor:
And still remember, Nature is not scant,
But that which thorns in life's rude way doth plant
Is the rank plenty—which man turns to want!

LEAVE THYSELF!

LEAVE thyself! All Nature says it.

Go, the heavenly voices count!

Is there in the world a river

That is sleeping at its fount?

Clouds to showers themselves transmuting

Down to earth in bounty run!

Sunbeams were to us but darkness

If they slumber'd in the sun.

How the air, the great sustainer,

Does to all things life bequeath!

To repay its breath of gladness

'Tis enough if all things breathe.

How the blossoms speed to fruitage:

With what passion spendthrift flowers

Give themselves away in fragrance

Through the beauty-giving hours!

Every seed to life is dying :
 The dead acorn hath awoke
Out of all its humble swathings
 To become a glorious oak.

Leave thyself! Earth's myriad voices
 Echo Nature's chorus . . . Hark !
How it fills the soldier's death-groan,
 The life-warble of the lark !

Leave thyself! The great example
 God, from time's first birth, began,
When He merged His happy nature
 In the depths of suffering man.

ON THE PROSPECT OF WAR.

FEBRUARY, 1859.

How the world holds its breath! The very air
Seems mute with listening! Ships with hushèd sails
Rest in their harbours, and for favouring gales
Lift not their white wings in one silent prayer.
Humanity plays large stakes everywhere,
For now the question trembles in the scales
Of peace or war. As fear, as hope prevails,
Freedom herself looks pale with doubtful fear.
Who waits the large event with steadfast eyes?
He only who the heart's throb can restrain,
Because he knows that Providence is wise,
Come peace—come war—and nothing can delay,
E'en if old Havock burst her bonds again,
The dawning and the advent of the day.

FORGIVENESS.

'Tis said, Heaven only shows its ruth
To those who plead on Heaven's own plan.
Alas, if this indeed be truth,
God is less generous than man !

Though suppliant foes with grace to thrive
By some is deem'd a noble task,
We feel 'tis greater to forgive
The foes who no forgiveness ask.

And, oh, the air is throbbing still
With those large words of pardon true,
" Father, forgive them all their ill,
Because they know not what they do."

TO THE LADY WHO CAME TO SEE
THE POET.

METHOUGHT my lot was somewhat lonely :
That thought no more shall be,
Since, by my rhymèd spell drawn only,
Thou, Lady, comest to me !

All echoless I would not die.
My prayer, thou granted art,
Which saidst, " It is enough if I
Touch but one human heart !"

Why did I doubt it ? Joy and moan
Beyond themselves must pierce :
The Poet never is alone ;
He stirs the Universe.

From One deep Source all spirits spring,
Back to One Fount we roll ;
And He who sings of God must sing
Unto some human soul.

Blest be the power that radiates
In song from impulse true,
And brings a stranger to our gates—
Perhaps an Angel too !

But have we met ? Oh, not so much
As on the silent page !
Embodied Spirits cannot touch
Throughout life's pilgrimage.

For outward things with inward jar,
And far from truth will roam,
And oft abroad the image mar
The heart had form'd at home.

Yet not so as concerneth thee !
Lady, thou art so fair,
Thy face itself is poësy,
And I can read thee there.

But Authors loftier language need
Than outward gait or look :
'Tis better, then, thou only read
The Poet in his Book !

A thousand chains of Earth's alloy
About our souls are thrown :
We but in worlds of purer joy
Shall know as we are known.

THE RAILWAY GARDEN.

GARDEN by the railway side,
Beauty fix'd where all things fly,
Little nook in prospect wide,
How thou charmest every eye !

Round thee is a desert sad,
But fond blessings far do pierce ;
Thou dost of thyself make glad
All that arid universe.

Thy own quiet, like a dream,
Wraps thy treasures. Touching thee,
E'en the giddy human stream
Calms its waves unconsciously.

Yes ! for Nature hath a power
Which the wildest bosom feels :
Midst the rush and grinding roar
To the heart thy wisdom steals.

Gentle shore to river rude,
How thy beauty in repose
Is with life and bloom endued,
More than dizzy motion knows !

Teacher of the busy throng,
Tender uses in thee lurk :
In thy softness thou art strong ;
Thou at once canst rest and work.

As the seasons come and go,
Thou art prompt thy stores to bring ;
Winter never chills thee so,
That thou canst not greet the Spring.

Summer and her darling rose,
Freshest turf of emerald shine,
Fragrance for each wind that blows,
These, by quiet right, are thine.

Here, beside the iron track,
Thou alone dost greet the showers :
Not a bee doth honey make,
Miles around, but from thy flowers.

In thy meekness thou art proud
As all finer spirits be ;
Thou wilt go not to the crowd,
Tis the crowd must come to thee !

Seen and seeing in thy place,
Little need hast thou to flit :
Thou dost view the world's *great race*,
And hast time to ponder it.

Garden by the railway-side,
Where the busy world doth roll,
Tender, blooming, and fresh-eyed,
Art thou not a living soul?

ON THE DEATH OF LIEUTENANT BELLOT.

THOU didst not on the battle-field
Amidst a heap of gory slain,
To snatch the wreath that battles yield
Imbrued with many a crimson stain;

Thou didst not fall a feverish prey
To lust of stores, that mines enfold,
Sinking beneath the tropic ray
To disinter the flaming gold;

Nor didst thou youth and health consume
Beneath Ambition's fervent power,
Which, calling forth delusive bloom,
Developes first, then smites the flower;

But thou didst in a loftier strife
Engage, from selfish impulse free;
And peril all thy best of life
In life's best cause — humanity !

From home, across the dangerous wave,
High kindred feeling drew thee forth :
Brave Bellot, thou to seek the brave
Didst dare the dark and frozen North.

O noble aim, replete with grace,
To render back, redeem'd from harms,
A husband to a wife's embrace,
A hero to his country's arms !

That aim was frustrate. Thou wert given
A guerdon sad to human sense :
It was not so ! All-bounteous heaven
Bestow'd itself for recompense.

And Nature hath her banner now
Majestic o'er thy bier unfurl'd :
How pure, how grand the scene where thou
Didst pass into a better world !

Of Earth's mean traffic not a sound
Did with thy solemn requiem roll :
The virgin snows that wrapt thee round
Express'd the whiteness of thy soul.

Meet grave was thine ! In taintless air,
Where nought corrupts beneath the sky,
Thy relics rest as if to share
Thy spirit's immortality.

Nor dead to us and our applause
The lesson thou didst die to teach,
That union in a generous cause
Is more than bonds of land or speech.

By two great realms thy name be writ,
More legibly than War's intrigues :
Deeds such as thine can nations knit
Beyond a thousand battle-leagues.

Let us not weep that thy young years
Should God's eternal beauty quaff :
Our noble envy, not our tears,
Shall be thy fitting epitaph.

ÆDIFICO.

LINES ON AN INSECT NEARLY CRUSHED IN A BOOK.

LIVING atom, marvel greater
Than the lifeless universe,
Spirit-hymn to thy Creator,
Go—thy Maker's praise rehearse !

Thee from being's page to sunder
Were no gentle task for me ;
Had I crush'd thee, insect wonder,
Who had reconstructed thee ?

Thought by thee is hush'd to muteness :
Miracle of sovereign skill,
How immense is thy minuteness,
Dower'd with passion, fraught with will !

Ships we know to frame and wield them,
Turn them where our fancy leans,
Towers and temples we can build them,
We are fertile in machines;

But our works through earth and ocean
Are restricted in their plan :
To construct a living motion
Doth surpass the power of man.

RICH AND POOR.

FROM Nature's lessons learn, ye men,
In humble patience to endure;
Why fret ye in Earth's narrow den?
The sun doth shine on rich and poor.

I saw a cottage-garden lie,
With snow 'twas cover'd o'er and o'er;
So was the rich man's park hard by:
The snow doth fall on rich and poor!

A blast the poor man's frieze coat met;
The rich man's hat away it bore;
Out of his way it did not get:
The wind doth blow on rich and poor.

I saw two funerals take their way
From cottage and from castle-door,
At the same hour of the same day:
Death comes alike to rich and poor.

THE WEEDING-GIRL.

SHE knows not care, she knows not pain,
Health has she—life's divinest pearl;
The owner of the vast domain
Quite envies his poor weeding-girl,
And views her with a thoughtful gaze
As past her his slow footsteps strays.

Her face with beauty is not bright;
But, when she doth look up at you,
Within her eye you see a light
That tells of something pure and true:
It meets your own, that clear blue eye,
As open as a morning sky.

She could not sing an artful lay,
Woven with choice and cunning words;
And yet her voice, in snatches gay,
Sounds sweet and happy as a bird's.
Her master pauses when the breeze
Brings him that note from out the trees.

Poor is she—poor her mother's cot;
Hard is her bed, hard is her fare;
Yet that rich man would change his lot
With hers, its bosom-peace to share;
For many, many a want hath he,
And not a single want hath she.

Yet he is not a selfish churl.
Full many a poor man he hath blest;
Only beside that weeding-girl
He bears a sad and humbled breast:
For well he knows, and feels the load,
Which of the two is nearer God.

A MAN.

WHY vary with the changing time,
Or man's unstable lot?
Lift up thy gaze! God is sublime,
Because He alters not.

But thou—how hangs thy blight or bloom
On Fortune's fickle span!
If steps a Duke into the room,
Thou art not the same man.

What self-respect to thee can cling,
While thou canst bow to pelf,
Control thyself before the King,
But not before thyself?

Ay! Bend at pompous shrines thy knee
Where Christ is now adored!
The Carpenter of Galilee
Had never been thy Lord.

Yet where the gain? Thy self-contempt
Is worse than any ill;
And, if from others' scorn exempt,
Thy own shall haunt thee still.

Well; just reverse thy smile and frown—
'Twill keep thy conscience clear—
The smile salute an honest clown,
The frown, a scoundrel Peer.

If thou canst only show one face,
One inner deed and plan,
At every time, in every place,
I'll call thee, then, a Man!

THE BEST GLORY.

THOU whose silent thought is beauty,
Of the Godhead voiceless scroll,
Who canst find no language-garment
Fine enough to fit thy soul;

Worker of the good that's near thee,
Who art steadfast, warm, and true;
Whose life-rule is, "Do to all men
As you would they should to you;"

Envy not the mighty minstrels
Singing so sublimely free,
That their voice harmonious gushes
As a brook at liberty;

Fret not at the world-improvers,
Who through life are loudly hurl'd,
Who can never leave in quiet
God to manage His own world;

Droop not in the shade and silence
Which so thick about thee lie;
For thou art thyself a poem
Duly read by God's great eye.

FAITH AND WORKS.

ONE says 'tis Faith, and one 'tis Works,
That save poor doom'd mankind;
They battle for their creeds like Turks,
Yet both, methinks, are blind.

For, while how future bliss to win
They loud discuss the way,
They leave out Love, which would begin
Man's happiness to-day.

THE UNSEEN FRIEND.


THERE is a kind One in the air !
The fire grows brighter on the hearth,
The chamber hath an air of mirth,
When He is there.

He will not let me think a thought
That is o'erspread with hateful gloom :
When I look sadly on the tomb,
He says—" 'Tis naught !"

He bends on me a constant eye :
With loving care my steps He guides.
If my own heart too keenly chides,
He asks me—Why ?

The past, the future, with His light,
He blends in one harmonious whole ;
If clouds across the present roll,
He makes them bright.

He filleth all my vacancy
When of deep love I feel the need :
So must I love Him—for indeed
He loveth me.



JOY AND SORROW.

WHAT is joy, and what is sorrow ?
Twins are they of changeful beam.
Each doth from the other borrow
Fitful substance—waking dream.

Evermore the heart beguiling,
Pains are pleasures, hopes are fears.
Hark that music! Thou art smiling,
Yet thy cheek is wet with tears.

Where the yearning soul reposes
Most divinely who can track ?
Restless now on beds of roses,
Now serene upon the rack.

With a trifle, sadder, blither,
Which is rapture, which is woe ?
Both are nothing, each is either,
If you only think them so.

FORGIVEN!

My heart is singing like a bird
That sits upon a summer tree ;
About me is Creation stirr'd
In light, and love, and melody ;
For God has spoke a happy word
Unto my bosom tenderly.

That word to me warm echoes bring,
Back from the Empyréan driven ;
It hath a voice, it hath a wing,
'Tis now on earth, and now in heaven :
It gushes from my heart's warm spring,
That happy word, "Forgiven !"

TO A FRIEND.

TURN to God and to His Son,
Soon thy suffering thoughts will cease ;
Happiness will then be won,
And thy spirit rest in peace.

Storms will do thee then no wrong,
Thine the glen, the grove will be ;
And the torrent sing a song
Of delight and hope to thee.

Then thou wilt the meaning know
Of affliction's chastening rod ;
All things love—ay, e'en thy foe—
In the joy of loving God !

SHORT THOUGHTS.

I.


PASSIONS indulged, passions forbid,
Are bitter both: yet this is true;
The passions, that thou most hast chid,
Shall prove the sweeter of the two.

II.

THE Bible read may war with man's best good.
The treasure is—the Bible understood.

III.

Is it the wilderness that makes a saint?
Nay! The reverse from legends is unfurl'd!
The demons that round Antony we paint
Flock'd to the desert, not the busy world.



IV.

NEVERMORE to Eden !
Closed is the bourn !
The fiery sword of Conscience
Waves, to forbid return.

The desert is around thee,
Scorching is the air.
But there's a land of promise ;
Look, O lost Spirit, there !

V.

THOU loveless soul, who canst our Father call
Less than the boundless loving sire of all,
If some are doom'd, by God's eternal vow,
To everlasting torture : Why not thou ?

VI.

"THE SAME YESTERDAY, AND TO-DAY, AND FOR EVER."

WHEN Death has changed our mortal state,
Does God, too, change from love to hate,
Or can the tomb annihilate
The fact that God has made us ?

Can e'en Omnipotence untie
Links which Itself did first supply?
Can Death, or Guilt of deepest dye
 Forbid a sire to aid us?
In life, in death, through good, through ill,
Our Father is our Father still.

VII.

"LOVING UNTO EVERY MAN."

THAT God is Love, that we His children are,
That He—our Father—for each child doth care,
These are realities. Then all we see
Of dark and sad can but unreal be:
God's earthly frown must be a smile above,
And Hell itself the shadow of His Love.

VIII.

"PRESERVER OF ALL MANKIND."

OH, what a battle-field Creation were
If God were not the safety of us all!
How might we go with trembling and despair,
Not knowing upon whom the lot might fall!
But how the heart laughs at the loveless lie,
For all but madmen say, "It is not I!"

The child that dances on the sunny grass,
The saint that over others' sins doth moan,
E'en while he hiccups o'er his cheerful glass,
Tell the same tale—We're safer than we own!
We feel God darts not from the clouds, and we
Are not the children of poor Niobe.

IX.

WHEN Moses gave a law of blood,
The times were dark, the times were rude;
But this I find:
Since Christ has made us less perverse,
The blessing shall restrain mankind
More than the curse.

X.

THE LORD'S PRAYER.

O PRAYER beloved! Oh, Prayer divine!
What wonders and what joys are thine!
Though small, thou art not narrow found;
Thou, like Eternity, art round,
Embracing in thy perfect span
The Infinite of God, and man.

XL.

SAVIOUR, who would not crown Thee as Divine,
And fuse the Omnipresent God with Thee,
That he might talk with goodness such as Thine
In every place, and through Eternity?

XII.

“How shall ye know all parables?” Christ said.
Now, if I dare a feeble answer make,
These words alone will from my bosom break—
“By loving heart, and not by loveless head.”

XIII.

REST on God! Thou’lt find a pillow
E’en upon Life’s tossing billow.

XIV.

CHRIST is the true Prometheus,
In whom all types, all shadows meet.
He bore the agony for us,
And taught men how to make life sweet.
He gave us holy fire from heaven,
And still the blessèd flame doth fan,
Which winter’s chill from earth has driven,
And from the brute upraised the man.

XV.

God His own aim and end to call
Man's generous heart denies.
"Nought for himself, but each for all!"
Our noblest instinct cries.

Yet we will break not Scripture's laws.
God, all things more to bless,
Made all things for Himself, because
He's one with happiness.

XVI.

'Tis said, God speaks when thunder rends the air.
Nearer the heart, methinks, God's voices roll;
Press round our secret footsteps everywhere,
And speak the loudest in the silent soul.

XVII.

NOTHING but simple trust in God
Can lighter make life's heavy load.
To vow, resolve, how apt are we,
Then sink into perplexity!
Be this, then, writ my door above,
"No resolutions—only Love!"

XVIII.

WHEN my heart asks, "Who shall resolve this dread?"
I whisper, "God!" And all my fears are fled.

XIX.

To intercede with God! O fearful thought!
In vain would holocausts before him bleed,
If His own goodness did not intercede
To bless each creature that His hand has wrought.

XX.

EACH mood of Deity is ever-living.
Then comes to me this reasoning broad —
If e'en one soul is unforgiven, God
Is unforgiving.

XXI.

Of all the riddles, with which Earth is rife,
The most astounding is a sinful life.

XXII.

ORT lured to Pleasure's flowery shelf,
To faults and follies driven,
Each feels he has a better self
That points and pants to heaven!

XXIII.

THE soul hath wings, and oft she longs to fly,
And try those pinions in the upper sky.
Still to dwell here, with all to make her blest,
She feels were splendid servitude at best.

XXIV.

HEAP gold and fringe about a ducal bier,
But give the poor the tribute of a tear.

XXV.

O God, what were we, if the heart
Spoke not above Life's bitter smart ?
O Father of this wondrous whole,
Hadst thou not written on the soul,
Through all our tortures horrible,
That one day all things shall be well ?

XXVI.

THIS is a question sad,
That much in me is moving :
Why God by men is call'd
Almighty, not All-loving !

XXVII.

THERE are who try to comfort you
By saying, others suffer too ;
And bidding you compare your state
With your poor brother's darker fate.
But such a comfort's selfish dram
More grieves me when I mournful am.
The more I see of ills around,
The more those ills on me rebound ;
Life's sorrows heavier on me come,
A unit in that awful sum ;
And but one joy from pain I strike,
That with mankind I share alike.

**“ A REASON FOR THE HOPE THAT
IS IN YOU.”**

THERE's for everything a reason,
Winter bare, and summer season ;
Autumn, golden in decline,
Spring that riots in the vine :
Comets that eccentric run,
Planets circling round the sun ;
Varied creeds, like leaves on trees,
Making men's varieties ;
Doubt, from which belief is wrought
By an earnest clasp of thought ;
Sin, that, by a heavenly scheme,
Brings Him, who doth all sin redeem ;
Sorrow, mother of Delight,
Death that opes the Infinite :
God gives man the loving task
Reasons for these things to ask,
And has given us Reason too
That we may His reasons view.
But the Bigot cries out “ Treason !
Ask not any other reason
For things human or divine
Than the Will of God—and mine !”

THE USE OF SORROW.

THERE'S not a grief but serves to teach
Truths needful to our span ;
There's not a loss that does not preach
Some lofty gain to man.

Evening might seem to common view
The shroud of Day's great dower,
But, under her sweet veil, the dew
Refreshes herb and flower.

And purifying are the shocks
Of mortal pain and woe ;
The stream that dashes on the rocks
Rebounds as white as snow.

Then deem not thou that God in vain
The human heart would pierce ;
One needless grief, one useless pain
Would sink the universe.

“BUT THEY THAT ARE SICK!”

O MY God, if Thou forsake us,
When from Thee we turn away,
Where is Love that for its children
Cares the more the more they stray?

Ah, our lot indeed were wretched,
If, when to ourselves untrue,
To our sin and pain of erring
We must add Thy anger too!

When our bosom is benighted,
When in thorny paths we rove,
How shall we be homeward guided,
If we see no smile of Love?

Soon shall we grow cold and reckless,
And in sin sink deeper thus,
If we deem, amidst our errors,
There is none that cares for us.

Father of each sinful being,
E'en as of the purest one,
Surely, surely, most we need Thee,
Then, when we are most undone!

LIFE'S TRUE LENGTH.

LIFE is so short ! This thought may heal
The heart, whose wounds drop sorrow's stream.
The axe, the gibbet, and the wheel,
What are they but a passing dream ?

Life is so short ! Then wherefore press
Its bright delusions to adore ?
A little more, a little less,
What matters it, when all is o'er ?

Life is so short ! Ah no, how long !
Space have we, while our moments move,
To stamp our fate with right or wrong,
To think, to feel, to know, to love.

Who measures such a gift sublime ?
All seems to pass, but nought can die :
Each finger-mark we lay on Time
Is printed on Eternity.

“ A SAVIOUR, WHO IS CHRIST ! ”

SAVIOUR, save us from ourselves !
Wreck'd we are on life's rude shelves ;
Many a trial from without
Breeds in us dismay and doubt ;
But the warfare and the sin
Are concentrated within :
Save us from ourselves !

God is good : — but our own cloud
Doth His goodness overshroud.
We are evil : — that doth make
Appearances an ill shape take :
All the great Creator's plan
In our own defect we scan :
Save us from ourselves !

Save us from our own sick brain,
From Imagination's pain ;
Satan and his gloomy court,
That with our weak senses sport ;

Fancied woe, the dread Ideal,
Than Reality more real:
Save us from ourselves!

Ah, we are our own undoers,
Of destruction subtle wooers!
When temptation, like a flood,
Runs and riots in the blood,
When the weak unguarded hour
Frames for us a dangerous bower,
Save us from ourselves!

Saviour, when Thy love's deep bliss
Snatches us from Self's abyss:
When in Thee expansive grown
We wipe all tears—except our own,
Others bless—ourselves deny;
Still be this our humble cry,
“Save us from ourselves!”

In our hope and in our fear,
In our triumph and our tear,
In the time of broken health,
In the wilder time of wealth;
In the hour life gasps away,
In the dread self-judgment day,
Save us from ourselves!

LOST AND SAVED.

WORDS, what mean ye, "Lost" and "Saved?"

Can anything be lost
That once its joyous flag has waved
On Being's radiant coast?

Is there the smallest particle,
Even of shining sand,
That ever yet to nothing fell
Robbing the yellow strand?

Lives not in God each atom-speck?
Is not each thing that is
Eternal? Can there be a wreck
Of one least thought of His?

Alike the orb whence Day is hurl'd,
Or water-drop, that holds
The wonders of the insect world,
His changeless Spirit folds.

And "Saved." The meaning of that word
Eludes me, as bestow'd
By mortal creeds . . . It strikes no chord.
Is not all safe in God ?

This only feel I, when my heart
Would make the matter sure,
Two states of mind before me start,
The frail and the secure.

As true or false the soul pursues,
We are or bright or dim ;
"Lost" to ourselves when God we lose,
And "Saved" when finding Him.

WAIT!

I HAVE pray'd, and now I wait :
What I ask may come full late,
But come it will !
Not yet have I found the clue,
But the inner voice is true ;
Then, heart, be still !

RIGHTS IN GOD.

O God! sometimes, when I with fancy play,
I boldly say,
That I have *Rights* in Thee.
O bear with me
While I declare what those strange *Rights* may be!

I have the Right of Sorrow, strong as Death.
Thine own Son saith,
“Come, ye with pain oppress’d!
Come, weary breast,
Come unto ME, and I will give you rest.”

I have the Right, the dreadful Right, of Sin,
Thy Grace to win;
Of fervent, strong desire,
To glow with fire
That lifts the soul from Earth’s polluting mire.

I have the Right of Ignorance. I know
Nothing below ;
Not what an hour's dark wing
On me may fling,
Nor what 't were best for me that Time should bring !

I have the Right of any simple Child,
Though weak and wild,
That doth a Father trust !
All-good, All-just,
I do repose on Thee my feeble dust !

I have the Right of Love. O wondrous Right !
Strongest in might !
To those man hath not shriven
This word is given,
" The soul that loveth most, is most forgiven."

PETER.

WHEN Peter did his Lord deny,
Methinks that crime the treachery
 Of Judas might outbid :
For Judas had a nature vile,
And Judas hung not on the smile
 Of Christ, as Peter did ;
And worse it is when eagles take
The creeping nature of the snake.

Yet for denial of his Lord
What vengeance was for Peter stored ?
 What doom to him befel ?
Did Heaven for him its wrath unfurl ?
Did Earth gape wide the wretch to hurl
 Down to the depths of hell ?
Ah no !—Let tears our eyes bedim—
The Lord but turn'd and look'd on him.

That look — be sure, nor cold nor stern —
Made Peter's bosom shrink and yearn,
 And pant with fond distress :
Into itself his heart sent back
To scan th' immeasurable track
 Of its unworthiness.
But, had that look been anger's blight,
Harsh fruit had grown where it did light.

Oh, eye of Christ, how beautiful
Art thou, except unto the dull,
 Whose soul with meanness weds ;
Ah sure, e'en now, when oft in crowds
Our sins should call from out the clouds
 Heaven's lightning on our heads,
Oh look of love, thy beam appears,
And melts us in remorseful tears.

“ IN LABORE QUIES.”

God and my work is all I ask ;
And not to feel that work a task.
Blithe would I labour like the bee,
Whose happy choice is industry ;
Who only looks to God as Guide
Over groves and rivers wide,
And who doth by instinct come
Back in safety to its home.
So would I, with full content,
Follow but my nature's bent ;
As God made me I would be,
And dwell in my identity.
How gladsome go the hymning spheres
On their majestic round of years !
Steadfastly they move through space,
For each is moving in its place.
So glad and steadfast is our road
When we do revolve in God.

He who toils hath dearest ease,
He who labours vanquishes.
Present anguish drops its coil
Before the holy bliss of toil.
Past delights, more dangerous
Than remember'd pains to us,
Like false gems, look dull and base
Before Employment's daylight face.
Grant me the empire of the globe,
Clothe me with pleasure as a robe,
Give me heaps of gold at will,
God and my work are dearer still.

THE TEACHER.

THE man who mercy's lesson taught
Alone shall guide my faltering thought.
Who else could lift me from my grief,
Or in my spirit build belief?

Shall the World take me to her school?
Too much I rue her treacherous rule!
Why tempt again the vain regret
From which my soul is smarting yet?

Shall Science my allegiance hold?
She wanders through a realm too cold,
Sees but herself upon the road,
Explains the world, and blots out God!

Shall high Philosophy upbear
My daring flight through upper air?
Shall Pride to stoic virtue steel
The bosom it forbids to feel?

All vain ! all vain ! Unmeet for us
The waxen wings of Icarus !
Both pride and wisdom fail to move
The heart that is athirst for love.


Shall I on Friendship cast my weight ?
Oft doth her aid humiliate !
And humbled hearts must ever be
The farthest from humility.

Shall I seek out Religion's form
To lead me far from mist and storm ?
Ah, *but* a form too oft is she,
Whose real name is Bigotry !

I cannot her behest receive
Who says, " Believe what I believe !"
And builds my safety on the curse
Of more than half the universe.

Those wolves disguised I cannot heed,
Who teach not Christ, but their own creed.
Ere I take any for my guide,
I in my Teacher must confide.

And then the Past, with many a chain,
Hath bound me prisoner of pain :
The noblest guide my fetters balk :
Ere I can follow, I must walk !



O Son of God, no guide I see
Worthy of any trust but Thee !
Thou best Instructor, good and true,
Not only wise, but loving too !

Thou givest not, when we ask for bread,
Learning, that cumbrous stone, instead.
Whate'er of knowledge Thou impart,
Thy teaching first doth feed the heart.

Remorse is but a torment base,
Thou shedd'st sweet sorrow in its place ;
And well dost Thou this truth discern,
That he who fears can never learn.

Through Thee the bosom is exempt
From its own bitter self-contempt.
'Tis the first step to heaven, for ill
That scorns itself sinks lower still.

The path of pain if Thou hast trod
To reconcile mankind to God,
A dearer triumph crowns Thy smile —
Man to himself to reconcile.

Then, Son of God, be Thou my Guide ;
My heart to Thee expand and draw ;
Be in my bosom deified,
But not by loud dogmatic law !

SALVATION.

SALVATION! Word of mystery! God must smile
To see how thou art merchandised by man.
Mahomet cries, "Accept me and my plan,
You're safe for ever." Other creeds the while
Upon our heads eternal curses pile,
If we dare doubt them. How escape the ban
Which chases us from Rome to Hindostan;
And, when we double back the weary mile,
Turns us to where we fled from? Tired one, stop!
Let no man hunt thee down with bloodhound fears:
Shut out Earth's babble from thy vexèd ears,
As one who sits on some great mountain's top,
And over him beholds the open sky,
And feels Earth's firmness underneath him lie.

GRATITUDE.

I THANK Thee, God, for all thy gifts
So largely pour'd on me ;
At morn and eve my spirit lifts
Its gratitude to Thee :

But most for one abiding power
My praise to Thee I bring ;
'Tis that I yet can love a flower,
A little flower of spring !

MORNING FRESHNESS.

WAKING out of sleep, we are
Every morning born again
Unto life—its joy and care,
Tender memory—hopeful pain;
And a kind of childhood we
Have in the day's infancy.

Half of real, half of dream
Sleep dispersing lightly brings,
And a flutter and a gleam
Trembles by from angels' wings,
And we have a double balm,
Joy of waking—slumber's calm.

Truer prayers with clearer ray
In the spirit's temple smile,
Ere the traffic of the day
Do the Sanctuary defile:
Brightest worship still is done
To salute the Orient sun.

Wouldst thou the reason know
Why the Morn this rapture breathes?
Tis the beauty and the glow
Which God's watchful smile bequeaths.
Sure, our helpless slumber dim
Was unconscious prayer to Him!

'Tis the pillar's lingering light
Which on the world's wilderness,
Through the darkness and the night,
Ever shines to guide and bless;
But amidst day's tumult loud
Turns again into a cloud!

A FEAR REMOVED.

SWEET is giving, sweet receiving,
Sweet is trusting utterly;
Sweet it is, when we are grieving,
To a faithful breast to flee:
Whatsoe'er the soul may move,
Everything is sweet with Love.

But, my God, a thought of sorrow
In my spirit's depths I see;
Though I all things from thee borrow,
I have nought to give to Thee!
Shall I send my sins above
In exchange for all Thy Love?

Canst Thou, Lord, on me relying,
Find in me a joy or rest,
As Thou didst, before Thy dying,
On the loved disciple's breast?
Wilt Thou trust me, who has weigh'd
How oft that trust has been betray'd?

How shall I escape this sadness,
How this depth of anguish brave?
Ah, I hear a voice of gladness,
"Thou hast something God would have.
Thou hast something to impart—
God is asking—' Give thy heart !'

" Give thy heart, then, nor endeavour
To compute how much it owes ;
Love, when Love is true, asks never
Which receives, or which bestows.
Go, rejoicing on thy road,
God in thee, and thou in God."

A PROPOSAL REJECTED.

A VOICE said, "Wilt thou be of the Elect,
And live in heaven, with endless joy bedeckt?"
I answer'd by a question in my turn :
"And must a number of my kindred burn,
And must I know that many a friend of mine
Is plunged for ever in a woe condign?"
"Yes!" said the voice, with somewhat of a laugh :
"But what can matter it, if thou be safe?
Nay, this perhaps may give thy joy a zest
To gaze on anguish while thyself art blest,
And swell thy gratitude to God, to see
He damneth others but preserveth thee!"
"Nay," I replied, "that were to me no bliss!
Now God preserve me from a joy like this!
If Heaven should heap Creation's wealth on me,
Yet leave one soul in endless misery,
Such partial love I spurn at and reject :
O no, I will not be of the Elect!"
"Then, wouldst thou," said the voice, "thyself condemn
With wretched souls an endless woe to stem?"

Wouldst thou with sinners down to torture flit?"

"Yes, if by sharing I could lessen it!

Partaken pain, methinks, grows ever less.

And, thus, I were not mock'd by the distress

Of my poor brethren!" Then, another voice

Said—"We but tried thee with a show of choice.

"Elect ones if there are, they cannot be

The self-elect: or that humility

Which Christ enjoin'd were worse than mockery."

“OUR FATHER.”

WHEN God did consent to make
 Of His Spirit countless heirs,
 Did not then the Father take
 On Him all a Father's cares?

For His children to provide,
 Stoop'd He not to care's alloy?
 Half His calmness laid aside,
 To increase His tender joy?

Of the penance and the cross,
 Is not this the meaning plain,
 That God, gaining man, had loss,
 Took the pleasure with the pain?

Neither lonely nor alone
 Dwelt He from the first of time;
 For His Nature—Three in One—
 Communed with Itself sublime;

And the angels girt Him round,
And His thoughts uprose in light,
Gushing into form and sound
Through the thronging Infinite.

Yet, methinks, there was a void
E'en in Godhead's plenitude,
Till the worlds, in air upbuoy'd,
Were with myriad life imbued :

Till the ether and the sod
Did with warm existence move,
Creatures hanging upon God
In their weakness and their love :

Till mankind to being stole,
Tenants of heaven's latest star,
Younger children of His soul,
Dear as younger children are.

Yet the Father oft we feign
Hard to please when we adore,
Making man for His own gain,
Craving praise for evermore ;

Giving nought that's truly ours,
Ever sowing but to reap—
Yet 'twas He who made the flowers,
Yet He watches while we sleep !

And, if fiery swords are set
Round us, 'tis to show the road.
Father! Ah, we have not yet
Realised that name of God!

Crying loud for mercy still,
Creeping servile to His gate;
Feigning to adore His will:
Yes! our worship looks like hate!

Yet He claims no servile due.
Hark! His voice o'er land and sea,
"Children, I belong to you,
More than you belong to ME!"

WHY WE LOVE THE PAST.

WHY is it that, though pleasant
The scenes around us cast,
Nor the future nor the present
Can charm us like the past ?

Why is it that, wherever
O'er hill and dale we roam,
Midst joys returning never
We feel the most at home ?

Is it that we are fearing
The march of coming hours,
That some precipice we're nearing
Although 'tis hid in flowers ?

Is it that life grows chiller
Every step we wander on ?
That the Past is so familiar
And the future so unknown ?

That no coming days restore us
Dearest spells the heart that bind,
That the dark grave lies before us,
And sweet infancy behind ?

That our gaze still backward guiding
We would turn from fortune's hap,
Like the child its face that's hiding
Upon its mother's lap ?

It may be so ! The boundless
Is cold and dreary still ;
And Eternity is soundless,
And the grave looks void and chill.

And, round ocean's vastness driven,
We for islands strain the view,
And we search the clouded heaven
For a tiny speck of blue.

Yet methinks some higher yearning
The past to us endears ;
That, with nobler impulse burning,
We turn to vanish'd years.

'Tis with love for the undying
That the gaze is backward bent ;
There we satisfy the sighing
For the fix'd and permanent.

The soul there waves her pinion
In eternal spirit-spheres,
And the grave has no dominion
In the dream of parted years.

'Tis a mirror of that heaven
Where no joy can pass or range ;
'Tis the only friend that's given
Whose face can never change.

Those we loved are cold or faithless,
Or they sleep beneath the pall ;
But in memory all is scathless,
And the dew of youth o'er all :

And the sunbeam parteth never
From the spots it used to glad,
And the brook is murmuring ever
With the voice that once it had.

We ourselves, while backward seeing,
Gain a beauty and a bliss,
Which once more restores the being
That received a mother's kiss.

So the chill and the deceiving
Of life withdraw their pain,
And our hearts are warm, and weaving
Immortal hopes again.

The visions of our glory
Once more are bright and near,
And we hear a generous story,
And we yet can shed a tear !

Oh, if not sad and lonely
Yet a forward glance we fling,
'T is that Hope is Memory, only
Without the grief and sting !

'T is that the noblest pleasures
From departed joys we win :
From the Past we cull the treasures,
Omitting all the sin !

And, its deep beauty hiving
Along Life's rugged road,
There's a better self surviving
That shall yet re-bloom in God.

DEDICATION.

My God, when, after weary days, I cast off Sorrow's load,
And suddenly there seems to fall a light upon my road;
When something of a childlike joy comes o'er my bosom free,
I dedicate—I dedicate—my happiness to Thee!

When thoughts of human woe, and, worse, of human crimes
oppress,
Thoughts of the tyrant and the slave, and wrongs without
redress;
If suddenly a large relief through earth's dark maze I see,
I dedicate—I dedicate—my better faith to Thee!

When I have long felt cold at heart, and deem'd all others
cold,
And found no gleam of sympathy in ought of human mould,
Then, should all things in heaven and earth again be dear
to me,
I dedicate—I dedicate—my joy and love to Thee!

But chief, when I from dreams of hate can lift my looks above,
And see that there must be an hour when all shall know and
love,
And Thou, O God, Thyself shalt speak, in spite of men's
decree,
I dedicate—I dedicate—my soaring hope to Thee!

ESAU.

AND hast thou, then, but one—one only blessing
In the deep wonder of thy treasury?
None for thy humble child, his sins confessing?
Me, also, oh my Father, bless thou me!

'Tis true my birthright I have from me riven;
I have been wilful—prone to every ill!
I have been quick for earth to barter heaven;
And yet, my Father, I have loved thee still!

I know not what still fed my mad endeavour
To wrong thee, Father, in my own despite:
Strange voices madden'd me, ingenious ever
To do myself injustice more than right.

I was not happy:—for I still was deeming
Thee could I never to affection move:
So all I cast away as idle seeming,
My birthright—worthless all—except thy love!

Despair to speak the love within me swelling,
While other lips could fondest words array,
Oft made my spirit reckless and rebelling :
For, oh, I knew I loved thee more than they !

And so I sought to stun my writhing spirit
By pouring wild emotions in my breast :
All joy's domains I struggled to inherit,
But never, never, found I joy or rest !

Older in years, I was in favour younger
Than he whom God decreed thy chosen son,
In something, then, I vow'd I would be stronger,
Yet knew not how the triumph might be won.

I had no art to seize the prize I wanted.
Poor trusting fool, to snares I ever ran ;
In wisdom weak, I ever was supplanted,
I could not gloze, or lie, or subtly plan.

In neither form nor mind God made me gracious,
I had no gifts the human heart to gain :
Then came a thought—to make my spirit spacious
In evil, and supremacy of pain.

I had stern joy to keep my way unyielding.
And such my native temper is in sooth :
Beneath no veil my stormy passions shielding,
Worse would I seem — not better than the truth !

And this at least, my Father, may impel thee
To trust that now I nothing from thee hide;
At least thou wilt believe the words I tell thee:
My faults are many, but I have not lied!

And this again has been a fount of error.
One touch of love can lead me evermore;
But nothing from me can be gain'd by terror:
And why not then have told thee this before?

I know not! Silence binds the hopeless debtor.
Hours are there when in speechless pain we wring;
And there are hours when the heart bursts its fetter,
Like mountain-ice before the breath of spring.

And this is one of them! 'Tis past expressing.
Father, I never was so blest as now!
It is so sweet—e'en asking for thy blessing,
And feeling thus thy hand upon my brow!

The silent agony of years is ended!
I speak, and know that I thy bosom move;
Father, thy son at length with thee is blended,
Thine eye, though dark to light, yet beams with love!

I kneel to thee. My soul its sin confesses.
God hears me, Father; and canst thou deny?
Yes! 'tis thy voice—oh happiness!—it blesses!
Now, Father, Father, it were joy to die!

COMPLAINT OF THE NATIVE AUSTRALIAN CONVICT.

"DO UNTO ALL MEN AS YOU WOULD THEY SHOULD DO UNTO YOU!"

WHAT have I done that I should be
The White-man's slave and prisoner?
I do not know, I cannot see,
In what it was my ways did err,
That from my friends I should be rent,
And given up to punishment!

I was born free as wind or wave;
I wander'd with unshackled limb;
What right then can the White-man have
That I must work to profit him?
Work? Yes! though bound with galling chains!
Work? Yes! though rage is in my veins!

In droves, like beasts, they urge us on,
To gather salt from the lagoons:
On our own land this ill is done,
And since so many, many moons!
And still we labour on unchanged;
We groan, and are not yet avenged!

They tell me I am here for life,
By some strange force they call a Law :
To understand this I have strife
Within me ; but no light I draw.
Nothing I find, except that I
Am full of grief and misery.

The White-man says, a Teacher good
Doth from the clouds watch o'er him still,
Who bids him shun all actions rude,
And neither rob, nor lie, nor kill :
Yet hath he ta'en my land from me,
And yet he slew my brethren three !

My father's bones we laid reclined
Upon a hill of goodly mark,
And round them duly did we wind
A shroud of the papyrus-bark ;
Under a gum-tree did we set
Our loved one with a due regret.

Oh, grandly there we saw him rest !
Over the sea he lookèd forth ;
From storm and vampyre was he blest,
And Boyl-yas of the wicked North :
Yet, worse a thousand times than they,
The White-man stole those bones away.

With woeful shouts we strove in vain
From the loved spot the foe to chase !
Vainly we fired the dry grass-plain
To lure him from the burial-place !
What of his band if some we slew ?
Was there no wrath, no vengeance due ?

Oh, how we reverence the dead !
How deep within us dwells the flame
Of love for those who earth have fled ;
We will not name their very name !
This never came into the thought
Of those who love and reverence nought.

Methinks the White-man's folly this —
To deem with pain we are not wrung
Because our skins are not like his,
Because we speak a different tongue,
Because we are too proud to tell
What feelings in our bosom swell.

Some think the White-men only are
Our ancestors renew'd in breath,
Who, clothed afresh in skins more fair,
The world revisit after death.
That this is true I do not find,
For then to us they would be kind.

Rather are they, if I may deem,
Of dark Jingá the children base,
Who haunts dark cave and gloomy stream,
And every evil dwelling-place,
Whom serpent-like the wild eye sees
When moan and creak the forest-trees.

I knew some ill was on its way !
Strange shadows stole the shrubs between ;
My talisman — O evil day ! —
Of quartz was by a woman seen !
And there were voices in the air
That crept and died I knew not where.

And, when the White-man first I saw,
Ah, sure 't was a foreboding true
That seized me with unhallow'd awe ; —
My spirit sicken'd at the view !
And through my frame strange shudderings ran
To see that pallid ghost of man.

Fools that we were ! He did persuade
Us, with his false and glozing tongue,
That he was come to bring us aid.
We nursed the snake until it stung !
Ah ! we had let him, in our sleep,
Into our very vitals creep !

Before that wicked foeman came
I knew the blessings of content :
The fever-kindling water-flame
Had not through me its madness sent.
If prisons be for actions base,
Why not then, White-man, take my place ?

Impose on us his customs ! Why ?
And are not ours as good as his ?
Have we not too a heart and eye
To know what's fitting or amiss ?
Is he so wise that we must learn
From him what most we loathe and spurn ?

And he hath with unused array
Of clothing tamed the supple limb,
And he hath cut the beard away,
I fain would champ and spit at him !
Oh for an hour of freedom now,
And the white war-paint on my brow !

What are the joys he bids me taste ?
Instead of freedom, bondage vile !
Instead of the unbounded waste,
A prison in a little isle !
The waters part my friends from me—
And yet their distant haunts I see !

I see the sunshine through my bars !
I see the uplands shining fair :
They brand within my soul new scars,
And yet I look for ever there !
I love to see those summits rise,
E'en through the tears that dim my eyes.

But, when I mark the blue smoke-wreath
That tells where blaze my brethren's fires,
Oh, then how quickly comes my breath !
How rage within me mad desires
Once more my native hut to see,
And dance my loved corobbery !

All things are free outside these walls :
The dancing waves their joy fulfil ;
With merry note the laugh-bird calls,
And seeks the desert at its will ;
The breeze comes in, to touch my chain,
But it can wander out again !

Ah wretched me ! new grief to find
Incapable I might appear ;
And yet fresh pangs can vex my mind ;
'Tis when another prisoner —
Another of my doomed race —
Is brought into this hateful place.

About my family and friends
At first I ask, how eagerly !
But in mad grief the transport ends,
And my whole blood grows hot in me.
My roving life, my home's delight
Then flash and kindle on my sight.

Of old what happy days I knew !
Amidst the woods how bold I sprang,
Upon the screaming cockatoo
To hurl the sounding boomerang,
Which round and round swoop'd through the air,
As though a thing of life it were !

O joy, with fire the bush to clear,
To guide its rage, its strength to tame ;
And, as it crackled far and near,
Feel ourselves masters of the flame ;
Delaying it with fresh, wet boughs,
Or shouting while the sparks we rouse.

What pleasure, where cool waters creep,
Upon the turtle's haunts to steal ;
Amidst the dashing surf to leap,
From rock to rock, to kill the seal !
Oh but to see the foaming shore,
And, oh, to spear the fish once more !

What pleasure was it to pursue
In pride of youth, from sun to sun,
The track of timid kangaroo!
And, when the noble prize was won,
Our children and our wives were near
To whisper praises in our ear.

When I could wander in the wood,
The meals I labour'd for were sweet:
'Tis true I here have plenteous food,
But then I have no heart to eat!
Hunger and thirst, if I were free,
Were more than any feast to me.

The very time of parching need,
Oh, now I wish it back again,
When scarcely was the wild grass-seed
Gather'd with care from plain to plain;
When the low waters in the creek
Shrank daily, and were far to seek.

I seem to see the tribe of old
Who forth did wander at my will;
The women who their Wan-nas hold
To dig the Menè-root with skill.
Oh, sweet unto my memory come
Our cakes of the Mimosa gum!

I know not how it is. I hear
Sounds, yet no real sounds are they :
Our native chant is in my ear,
Our songs to keep ill things away ;
Our converse, and our tuneful cry
That rings through forests, sweet and high !

And sometimes from my view will shrink
The very walls that hem me round,
And, as upon the past I think,
I only see our hunting-ground :
And I recall to my desire
Our visitings from fire to fire.

Or happy journeys do I make
At times of festive holiday,
And a glad pilgrimage I take
With those who now are far away ;
And to the distant coast we flock
To view our drawings on the rock.


My child ! my child ! my pride, my bliss !
I see thee, too, my little boy !
I press on thee a father's kiss,
And know again a father's joy :
And then the hated White-man calls,
And then I see my dungeon-walls !

O stay afar, my little child,
Stay in the desert, come not nigh,
Approach not thou, nor be beguiled
Ever to trust the White-man's lie!
Thinking of thee, I almost fear
This very moment thou art here.

I would that I were not so strong!
Too well within me Nature stirs,
Who of herself doth life no wrong.
Oh, work on me, ye sorcerers!
I talk of you, in hopes that ye
Will bring a speedy death on me.

And then, perhaps, my native tribe
Will deem the White-man drew my breath;
And, roused by song and woman's gibe,
Will hasten to avenge my death;
Will point each spear, and bind anew
With sinews of the Kangaroo.

Ah, there are moanings on the gale!
They wound the face, they rend the hair:
I seem to hear my own death-wail.
Oh, tear my hut, in pieces tear!
And round its silly fragments spread,
For I, in very truth, am dead!



THE SHEEP.—A FABLE.

IN THREE PARTS.

PART THE FIRST.

In the days when animals talk'd like men
(And I think they do now just as much as th
Only this age is dull of ear)
Certain sheep were seized with a terrible fear

About their shepherd some doubts they had,
(And doubts of their shepherd make even me
Because he spoke as never before,
And did not look the same as of yore.

Then whisper'd a sheep of inquisitive mien,
 "I'll only just tell you what I have seen.
 From behind a tree on yonder hill
 I saw this shepherd the true one kill.

"He kill'd the true one—his skin he stript—
 Into it, like a snake, he crept,
 And said to himself, 'Ha! ha! Now we'll see
 What sort of a shepherd *I* shall be!'"

As the sheep heard this story with dismay,
 A goat came wandering up their way,
 (Now the goat with hatred the sheep pursues)
 And said, "My friends, have you heard the news?"

"What news?" ask'd the sheep, with a quake of fear,
 For they felt a foreboding that mischief was near;
 "Why, about the new laws." "No," said they, "not a jot!"
 "I'll tell you what they are," said the goat.

"These laws are indeed a terrible code:
 If a sheep should wander out of the road,
 The synod of shepherds will contrive
 To roast for ever that sheep alive."

"One day of the week is to be a day
 When the shepherds forbid you to eat or play:
 If a sheep on that day to the pasture creep,
 Doubly roasted will be that sheep."

Alas, too soon it was proved in sooth
That the goat had almost spoken the truth!
That day of the week—that dreadful day—
Came to forbid them to eat or play.

Moreover, temptations beset that day
To make the poor sheep more prone to stray.
Such joy was round them, they felt their blood tingle
Somewhat, themselves, with that joy to mingle.

The shepherds, that day, went gaily drest
To feast in an arbour and take their rest,
And to sing certain praises, meant for the sky,
To a grim old idol they'd stuck up on high:

But they would not suffer the sheep to come near.
“You're too dirty,” they said, “too unworthy to hear
The beautiful words and the praises we sing
Up to that fine old Idol-king.”

And they would not let the lambkins play
With the grass or the flowers on that terrible day:
They were all to lie still with nothing to do;
No wonder they stray'd—so should I, or you.

Hunger and thirst bewilder'd their senses,
They were shut from their own true pastures by fences;
So to poisonous grass they made migration,
And drank from pools that were black with stagnation.

Then they were sick and in mournful plight,
But the chief shepherd said, "Serve you heartily right!"
And he came, though to help them he would not budge,
To try their cause like a righteous Judge.

"He said, "I have told you not to stray,
But to lie quite still on my holiday;
So, now you have stray'd, I am going to contrive
In eternal fire to roast you alive.

"But go your ways for the present, ye sheep;
Not yet I'll roast you, I'll take some sleep:
Play and eat, if you will, for a little span;
And mind you love me as much as you can!"

Sadly the sheep, while the shepherd slept,
Into a corner nestled and crept;
They could not eat, and they could not play,
For the terrible words they had heard that day.

Worse than their fears were some thrills and starts,
That curiously stirr'd within their hearts.
On the shepherd's last words their fancy ran,
"Mind you love me as much as you can!"

And one said to the other, "Why yes, I feel
That a little love would my sorrow heal:
Nature seems to have made me so,
That badly indeed without love I go.



“ And I think of our shepherd (the true one I mean),
How good he was with his look serene,
And how he amused us on holidays,
And show’d his love in a thousand ways.

“ I know that he loved us—he always was nigh—
And then we could read the love in his eye !
But to love this new shepherd who can contrive?
And, besides, he threatens to roast us alive.”

Then the poor sheep, in a fever of doubt,
Pour’d together this chorus out :
“ Powers if there be in the regions above,
Oh, send us a shepherd whom we can love !”

PART THE SECOND.

THE sheep we left sighing in doleful mood,
Lamenting the loss of their shepherd good ;
Sudden appear'd to their wondering sight
A beautiful sheep, all snowy white.

Now you must know, in the Golden Age,
When the shepherd was kind, and the sheep were sage,
The sheep ever chose, by twenties and twelves,
Certain rulers and teachers from out themselves.

These teachers were chosen because they were good,
And worthy to teach, and of gentle blood ;
Teachers, who their scholars knew,
Because they had the same nature too.

But now, since false shepherds had robb'd the skin
Of the true ones, and crept so cunningly in,
No choice had the sheep, teachers none of their own,
But the goats were set o'er them to make them groan.

So, when the beautiful sheep drew near,
They felt their hearts throb, but not with fear,
For they saw, and their inmost bosoms knew
He was one of themselves—a Teacher true.


And oh, above all, the young lambs felt
The heart within them breathe and melt :
Ere that Teacher had said one word, they spy
The love that shone in his tender eye.

And when he spoke, O mercy and grace,
There was a calm and a hush in the place !
He said, “ Believe not every word,
There’s but little truth in all you have heard.

“ The shepherd, that false one ! his threats may lour,
But to bring them to pass he has no power ;
There’s a Higher than he who dwells above,
Who has not a thought that is not love.

“ ’Tis He alone who could ever contrive
To torture the weak ones, and roast them alive ;
But He never will, and He never could,
Because they are feeble, and He is good.

“ True it is we are silly sheep,
But because we are silly His love is more deep ;
He sent the true Shepherd, His own dear Son,
To seek and to save every straying one.



“ And that Highest, who dwells all heights above,
Once sent us a message of comfort and love;
Glad tidings of greatest joy it had:
So let us take care that the tidings *be* glad.


“ It spoke of forgiveness that cometh to all,
Of peace, and good will, and a festival,
Which, when we all are made good, shall be
A general joy for Earth to see.

“ The fire, dear friends, that you heard about,
Has an inward meaning for us, no doubt:
It means a state of the burning heart,
When its faults are melting, but loth to depart.

“ We know not how long this fire may burn,
But we know that its flames we to good may turn;
Who believes it eternal overweens:
Dear children, who knows what Eternity means?

“ And, when we shall see ourselves as we are,
And God as He is, and our hearts shall be fair,
By His own dear promise there's no doubt,
That, its work being done, the fire will go out.

“ You ask'd for a Shepherd whom you might love:
He is there—He is there—in the brightness above!
Love Him you must, and your faults will depart;
For kindness melteth every heart.



“ And then no more will you wish to stray,
But always beneath his eye to stay.
He will give you grass and dews and flowers,
And let you play in the safest hours.

“ Ah, then, you will not need my voice,
For you all will be good of your own free choice :
You will not care for false shepherds—not you —
For you’ll only be thinking about the true.

“ Now, mind you remember all that I’ve said :
They will try to put it out of your head ;
They will threaten you with a voice of might,
They will call light darkness, and darkness light,
But for you, while you love, there can never be night.”

Just then a phalanx of goats came out
From a cave, where they had been spying about ;
They had heard every word of the Teacher good,
And, oh, what a rage it put in their blood !

They wagg’d their beards, and they look’d as fierce,
As if with their eyes they the Teacher could pierce ;
And they said, “ You shall hear of this again ! ”
And so they departed over the plain.

PART THE THIRD.

THE false shepherds were sitting in conclave high,
When they saw the troop of the goats come nigh,
And they said, "What news of our troublesome flock,
And the Teacher we sent them under the rock?"

"Oh, horrible!" cried the goats, with one voice;
"That Teacher should never have been your choice:
He told them such things—as—I cannot repeat!"
"Speak out," said each, fidgetting on his seat.

"He told them—oh, I can't say it all!—
That the Great One loveth both great and small;
And the poor silly sheep, that contemptible crew,
Just, my masters, as well as you!

"Nay, he hinted (but now, indeed, I quake!)
That He sent His Son for the silly sheeps' sake;
And that the more the sheep should rove,
The more they had need of kindness and love.

“But—oh, worse!—he call’d you false shepherds, drest in
Only the shreds of the true one’s skin,
And he said ——” “What! what!” cried the shepherds, quite
pale,
“Now make a full end of your horrible tale!”

“He said,” continued the goat, seeming sad,
But, in truth, to repeat such things rather glad,
“He said, though you threaten’d, you could not contrive
To roast for ever the sheep alive!”

A groan went round the conclave high,
And the shudder they gave seem’d slow to die;
But they stopp’d, for each fear’d to crack the skin
Which so artfully he was sew’d up in.

“Quick!” said the chief of the shepherd-drove,
“First slaughter ten sheep to make parchment of;
Then bring the parchment to us, and we
With their blood will write—such things—you’ll see!”

The shepherds spoke, and the goats obey’d;
The sheep were slaughter’d, the parchment made;
And then, by the aid of some lawyer goats,
The parchment was fill’d with horrible notes.

It was written that he, who should dare to name
That the Great One loved all His creatures the same,
Should have a huge label stuck on his back,
And be hunted away by a bloodhound pack.

It was written that he, who should dare to hint
That the Great One would not, without any stint,
Bless the shepherds and curse the sheep,
Down a loathsome pit should be tumbled deep.


It was written that he, who should make a din
That a shepherd had robb'd his master's skin,
Should be set on a lofty pillory,
And pelted at till he lost an eye.

But he who should say that none could contrive
To roast for ever the sheep alive,
Should be branded with iron, and scourged with whips,
And sent off with a padlock to fasten his lips.

As soon as the terrible parchment was writ,
Oh, how glad went the goats with it !
Upon their horns they stuck it upright,
And brought it before the good Teacher's sight.

" See," said they to the Teacher good,
" See this parchment all writ in blood :
See the laws that are writ in capitals tall ;
And you, my friend, have broken them all !

" You to the sheep have dared to name
That the Great One loves all His creatures the same ;
You have said (now Heaven us protect !)
That the Shepherds are not the Elect !



" You have dared to go about with a din,
Saying, your shepherd is drest in a skin ;
You have said that surely none can contrive
To roast for ever the sheep alive !

" And so the bloodhounds must hunt you away
Till a pitfall hide you from the day :
You must be pilloried, scourged with whips,
And sent off with a padlock to fasten your lips."

" My friends," said the large white sheep, " you may
From your company hunt me and chase me away ;
You may plunge me in pitfalls, and scourge me with whips,
But *not* with a padlock fasten my lips.

" See !" and he show'd that his forehead around
There were words of gold on a silver ground ;
" This from the Great One my safety ensures.
See ! here is authority mightier than yours !"

Then the goats, with somewhat of dazzled eyes,
Fell back a little in their surprise,
And said, " O Teacher ! we only mean
Your good, and that of the sheep, we ween.

" The shepherds, indeed, have bid us say
That they quite regret to send you away :
You may stay, if you own that they can contrive
To roast for ever the sheep alive."

“No!” said the Teacher, with soft sad voice,
“I will never own *that*; to depart is my choice:
Only I beg, ere from hence I remove,
To say a few words to the flock I love.”


“No, no!” cried the goats, “you no longer can stay!”
And the shepherds exclaim’d, “Go away, go away!”
So the fair pure sheep—the Teacher good—
Was scouted and hunted away to the wood.

Now what ensued I am loth to tell.
The poor sheep loved no Teacher so well:
And the shepherds from them no love could win,
For the sheep knew well they were dress’d in a skin.

The goats were set over them more and more,
Who told ugly stories to make their hearts sore;
And they heard every day, some one would contrive
In eternal fire to roast them alive.

More and more they were kept from the bowers,
And forbidden to play with the grass or the flowers;
And the pain of six days brought the dreadful day
When they might neither eat nor play.

Yet they saw, far off, bright streamlets run,
And beautiful gardens shine in the sun,
Where they were promised a holiday game,
And then shut up when the holiday came.



So their tortured hearts could not look above,
And they saw no ruler whom they could love:
And the most of them went still more astray,
And ate of the poisons that grew by the way.

Only a few—a faithful few—
Thought of the Teacher whom once they knew,
The fair white sheep with the loving look,
And they writ his words in their hearts' own book.

And these the goats and the shepherds obey'd,
Mournful they were, but they never stray'd;
Nothing their goodness or hope could remove,
Because they had One in their hearts they could love.

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